



Wegman's World









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*Noble Dog—Paint By Numbers* 1978 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York



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Lisa Lyons • Kim Levin

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*Contemplating the Bust of Man Ray* 1978 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York



# Wegman's World

Lisa Lyons

William Wegman is one of the art world's most affable subversives. Though identified with various aesthetic persuasions, he has always been a lively maverick, difficult to categorize. He is perhaps best known as the video artist who stole into the modernist academy in the early 70s and shattered its sober facade with a sequence of hilarious tapes starring himself and a canine confederate—his pet Weimaraner, Man Ray. Since those early days, however, Wegman has also produced a significant body of work in two other media: photography and drawing. The majority of these works, like his vaudevillian video skits, are patently humorous and viewers who immerse themselves in their quirky tongue-in-brain logic usually come up laughing. Beneath their engaging, comedic surface, however, lies a strong formal base that supports a Pandora's box of such provocative ideas as transference of identity and exploration of the realm of the irrational.

The process of analyzing Wegman's works can be a difficult, sometimes frustrating exercise. Discussing them, we recall E.B. White's observation that "humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind."<sup>1</sup> Then, too, there is the matter of style. Dada. Surrealist. Pop. Conceptual. Wegman's art can be described in part by any of these labels and yet it eludes all of them. And apparently that's just the way Wegman likes it, for when asked with which tradition he feels the greatest affinity, he demurs: "They always ask me what my art stands for," he once said, "and I tell them it doesn't stand, it sits."<sup>2</sup>

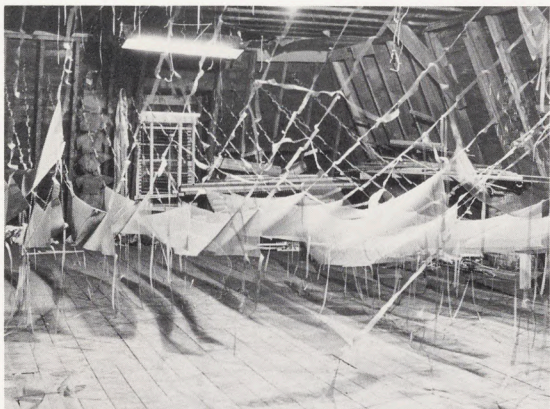
Full captions for illustrations appear on p 78.

Unless otherwise identified, quotes are taken from the author's tape-recorded conversations with the artist between June 1981 and August 1982.

1. E.B. White as quoted in Norris W. Yates, *The American Humorist: Conscience of the Twentieth Century* (Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1964), p 11.

2. "Rumbles," *Avalanche*, Fall 1970, p 8.





Untitled 1968

Born in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1943, Wegman grew up in the nearby town of East Longmeadow in “a typical Ozzie and Harriet kind of family. You know: two children, youngish parents, not rich, not poor; a backyard with a badminton net; and a TV bought in 1955, a respectable time after the first one in the neighborhood.”

Drawing was his favorite childhood pastime and he spent hours copying pictures from coloring books and his favorite kiddy encyclopedia, *The Book of Knowledge*. He was, in his own estimation, precocious. “I never went through a child phase. I was one of those kids who could draw in perspective when I was four,” he boasts and recalls that it wasn’t long before he abandoned his crayolas for a set of Winsor & Newton watercolors. “The drawings I made as a kid were in a certain way more sophisticated than these,” he recently remarked while leafing through a stack of his new cartoon-like sketches. “They looked like a 15-year old drew them; except for the signature. I could hardly write my name.”

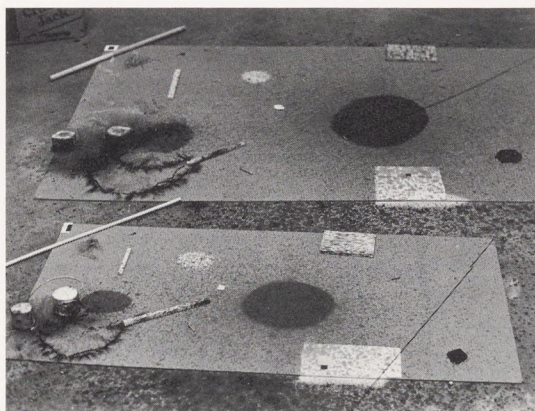
Art remained an absorbing activity for Wegman until, as a teenager, his interests turned to sports. “But I was floundering in high school Latin and algebra and needed an A,” he explains, so he enrolled in an art class to boost his grades. Encouraged by his teacher who recognized his considerable talent, he applied and was admitted to Boston’s Massachusetts College of Art in 1961.<sup>3</sup>

During his four years there Wegman became, as he says, “one of the marching minimalists,” producing hard-edged paintings whose pristine surfaces carried modular patchworks of closely related hues. On the basis of these, he was admitted to M.F.A. studies at the University of Illinois, Champaign, in 1965, and that fall he set off for the campus with a fellow Massachusetts College graduate, Robert Cumming. Their paths had crossed only occasionally in Boston, but now they became fast friends who shared, as Wegman puts it, “a certain kind of gallows humor” and an iconoclastic attitude about artmaking that eventually found expression in their mature work.

Wegman describes his years in Champaign as an exciting but “schizophrenic” period in which he experimented with a wide variety of media and disparate styles. For a time he made found object constructions in a “kind of San Francisco funk, but no quite so . . . mammary style,” before getting on again with his “serious hard-edged paintings à la Frank Stella.” But it so happened that in the 60s Champaign was a midwestern outpost of the burgeoning art and technology phenomenon that was sweeping the coasts. Soon, Wegman

3. Gerald Marzorati, “Did I Say Something Funny?,” *The Soho Weekly News*, April 5, 1979, p 29.





Untitled 1969

obtained a fellowship to collaborate with students in the department of electrical engineering on “interactive electronic environments.” Among these was a group of huge inflatable structures housing viewer-activated sound, light and mechanical sculptures. Humor was hardly in abundance in these works, though Wegman recalls one—by opening a door viewers unwittingly triggered a dixie cup dispenser to release its contents—that had a certain Dada impishness about it.

As a result of his forays into technology, Wegman ultimately decided to abandon painting completely to pursue “the new art.” By 1967 he had received his M.F.A. and had accepted a teaching position in Wausau, Wisconsin. He was no longer tied to any single medium or style; rather, he used various materials and formats to explore time, process, viewer participation and perception—interests that had been sparked (!) by his electronic experiments.

Among his early efforts were large minimalistic sculptures made of conduit and sprayed with phosphorescent paint. Exposed to light and then installed in darkened rooms, their hulking forms were magically transformed into elusive, glowing presences. Later works included ephemeral batwing constructions of fiberglass screening. Hung in rows from the ceiling or stacked on the floor, they emitted shimmering, moiré patterns as viewers passed by. Wegman also dabbled in performance, orchestrating, for example, an amusing Cage-ian concerto for 100 cars, whose driver-participants honked horns, slammed doors and turned on radios according to pre-arranged cues.<sup>4</sup> Other projects were of a more conceptual nature. For example, using letters and punctuation marks cut from styrofoam blocks, he assembled cryptic messages, then he set them adrift in the Milwaukee River. To document their slow journey downstream Wegman used photography, having one of his students teach him to develop and print his own pictures.

After two years of teaching in the nether regions of northern Wisconsin, Wegman landed a plum job at the state university’s main campus in Madison. There he became, as he puts it, a card-carrying member of the “piece movement.” He made duration pieces, wall pieces, and what he considers to be among his most successful works from that period, distribution pieces: temporary installations in which such items as rolls of tape, nails, matches, lengths of rubber tubing and pieces of plywood were deployed across the floor. In many of these works Wegman focused on comparisons of size and proportion. For example, he created a Kandinsky-like composition from piles of gunpowder, confetti, plaster, pieces of paper and found objects on a 4 x 8 foot sheet of particle board.

4. Cage had been artist-in-residence at the University of Illinois while Wegman was a student there.





*Faculty Lounge* 1969  
(detail)  
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Then on a second smaller sheet of particle board of slightly different proportions he recreated the composition, changing the scale and proportion of the elements in relation to those of the field.

In Madison, Wegman also executed some more whimsical environmental installations that involved temporarily rearranging the contents of rooms in the campus's studio arts building. He transformed the faculty lounge into a distribution piece for a few hours one afternoon, using its furniture, plants, books, even its occupants as the basic compositional elements. As a matter of course he photographed these guerrilla events, initially viewing the resulting black and white images merely as convenient documents of his efforts. But as he studied the pictures more closely he began to sense their significance beyond the documentary. After all, so short lived were his hit-and-run intrusions into the campus environment that few individuals experienced them firsthand. Rather, most people knew about the works through the photographs.

His intuitive feeling that photographs could be something more than just "evidence" was soon to be confirmed. As he explains it:

*I was going to a party one night and so I decided to decorate myself a bit—after all, it was the era for that sort of thing. So I put on my favorite ring and then drew some little circles on my hand. Later at the party I reached for a piece of cotto salami on a white plate and saw that the circles on my hand looked the circles in the salami. I was struck by the magic of the coincidence. I got very excited, rushed home early to recreate the scene on my kitchen table and photographed it.*

The resulting picture is, on one level, a strongly formal composition depicting a slice of life in a world where the dominant building blocks are circular. On another, it is an engaging visual pun—perhaps on the term "ham-handed" (?)—with surreal overtones. For it appears that by reaching for the cold cuts, Wegman had triggered some curious osmotic process and that his hand had begun to metamorphose into another, shall we say, more edible state. *Cotto* was a revelation to Wegman for he realized that he had begun photographing in a new way. The image was not a record of a performance, not a document of a work that existed in another state, but a finished work of art in and of itself.

It was about this time that Wegman discovered the University education department's half-inch video recorders. "They were around to document lectures and things like that," Wegman recalled. "And there was this





Cotto 1970 Collection Holly and Horace Solomon, New York





other artist there with some sort of disease—an allergy to paint—who was using the video equipment.” He began to experiment with the equipment every chance he had, taping short sketches in which he used as props the items that were the materials of his floor pieces.<sup>5</sup> Working with video reinforced his newfound belief in the aesthetic integrity of photographic images. “Sitting alone in the room with the equipment, I realized that I was making something for this box, something specifically to be recorded by the camera,” he said. More than that, the images that were displayed on the video screen, he realized, were completed works—primary expressions, not secondhand evidence.

• • •

By the time he packed his bags for California in 1970 to teach at the state college in Long Beach, Wegman had begun to feel “that the piece movement was a pretty crowded territory” and he resolved to take a new turn. “When I got to California,” he told Liza Bear in a 1973 interview, “it became a resolution not to let myself get too far away from what I was really thinking about. And more than that, I wasn’t going to build a body of work based on my previous work.”<sup>6</sup>

As a matter of fact, however, strong relationships to the works he had made in Madison can be found in the photo pieces that Wegman began making in California. For like his floor pieces, these new works reveal a preoccupation with transformations, oppositions and various subtle quirks of perception. Consider, for example, a 1970 diptych consisting of two black and white photographs of Wegman’s studio. Upon first

5. Marzorati, p 28.

6. Liza Bear, “Ray, Do You Want To . . . An Interview with William Wegman,” *Avalanche*, Winter-Spring, 1973, p 48.



*Madam I'm Adam* 1970  
Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York



inspection, the two pictures seem to be identical. But a closer look reveals that virtually every single object in the first photo appears in duplicate in the second image; that is, there are two paint cans rather than one, two sponges rather than one, two plants rather than one and so on. The fact that it takes most viewers quite a while to detect the doubling suggests just how easily our perceptions can be confounded.

The difference between the facts of a situation and the way we read or interpret those facts is likewise the focus of *Madam I'm Adam*, 1970. As its title suggests, this self-portrait diptych is a complex visual palindrome. To create this piece Wegman first photographed himself seated at a table with the fingers of his raised left arm covering his face. Then he assumed a mirror-image pose; that is, he raised his right hand to his face, parted his hair on the opposite side, and so on, to completely reverse the left-right orientation of the scene. He printed the first photo normally; but he printed the mirror-image photo in reverse (he “flopped” the negative), a bit of darkroom wizardry that effectively reversed the left-right orientation of the scene once again. Thus, seen side by side the two photographs look virtually identical. It is only when we notice that the numbers on Wegman’s watch face are backwards in one of the photos that the more fundamental difference between the two images becomes evident.

Not all of Wegman’s photographs from this period pose such taxing challenges to our senses. Other less didactic images poke gentle fun at our seeing and believing habits. In one such work, the shadow of a crow appears to be cast on a wall by a stuffed parrot—a logical impossibility





*Crow* 1970 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York



that initially passes right over our heads. The humor in this image, the classic double-take response it inevitably provokes, arises from our recognition of just how much our expectations can pervert our perception of reality.

• • •

Shortly after settling in Long Beach, Wegman gave into his wife's long-standing request for a dog. First they looked at Dalmatians and then following up on a newspaper advertisement, they checked out a litter of Weimaraner puppies. "We fell in love with this fat little dog who wouldn't pay attention to us," Wegman recalls. But still not certain that he wanted a dog in his future, he decided to flip a coin: heads, no dog; tails, the Weimaraner. It came up tails—seven times—and 35 dollars later the Wegmans were dog owners.<sup>7</sup>

Wegman originally wanted to name his pet "Bauhaus" after the famous art school founded in Weimar, Germany in 1919. But a Bauhaus, Wegman reasoned, ". . . should be black, white and square, while this dog was gray shaded toward blue and plump with baby fat. 'Suddenly, late that night,' he recalls, 'it came to me like a light bulb: Man Ray.'"<sup>8</sup>

The dog, Wegman discovered, required a lot of attention and he began to take him along to classes. "At first, he seemed untrainable and my students who thought this awful dog was making me neurotic told me to get rid of him," Wegman remembers. At his studio, the pooch would not stay out of the artist's way. When Wegman tried tying the dog in a corner, Man Ray would howl. Unleashed, he would inevitably blunder into the area where Wegman was arranging things to be photographed or videotaped.<sup>9</sup> It was then that Wegman discovered that as long as he "was pointing a camera at the dog, he would be quiet and happy." And so he ultimately decided it would be easier to work with Man Ray rather than around him.

He began cautiously, making a conscious effort to avoid using Man Ray ". . . in a cute doggy way as in dog food ads or in a falsely sentimental way like Lassie or Trigger." Initially, he treated Ray in much the same manner as the inanimate props he set before the camera—as a formal element of a composition. "In a way he's like an object," Wegman once said. "You can look at him and say, now how am I going to use you, whereas you can't with a person. . . ."<sup>10</sup>

Some pictures belie this sanguine attitude, however. *Dog Dream*, for example, a charming four-panel photo narrative in which the sleeping

7. Laurance Wieder and William Wegman, *Man's Best Friend* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982), p 7.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Bear, p 41.





*Dog Dream* 1970 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York



puppy is visited in his dreams by a curiously animated stuffed alligator and a taxidermied squirrel, suggests that Wegman was quickly falling under the spell of Man Ray's photogenic appeal.

• • •

In 1971 Wegman moved to Santa Monica, renting a studio near Los Angeles's artist quarter, Venice. The change of scene triggered a change in his art. As he explains it:

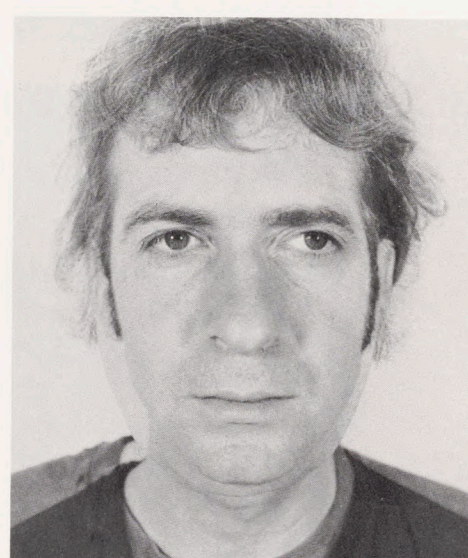
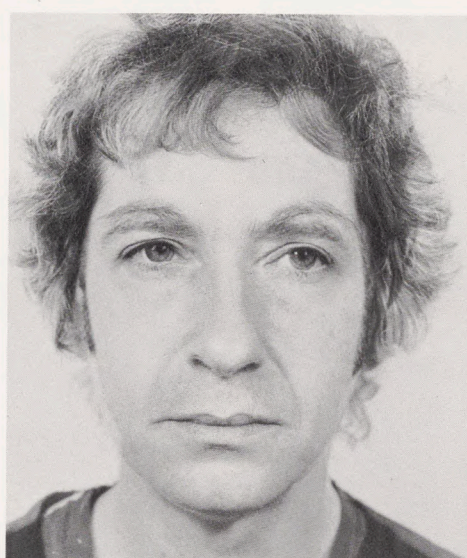
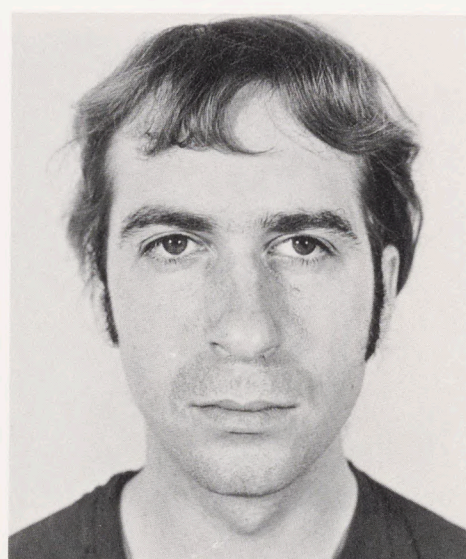
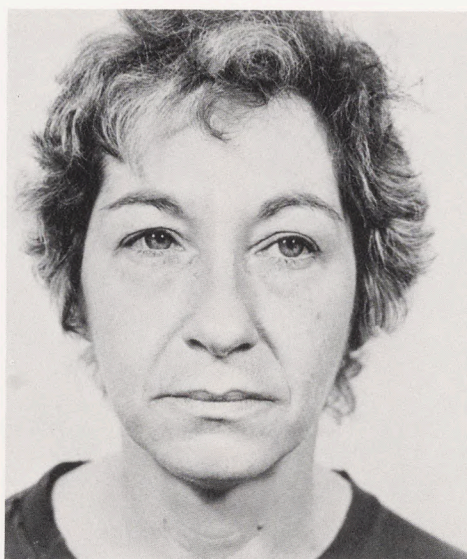
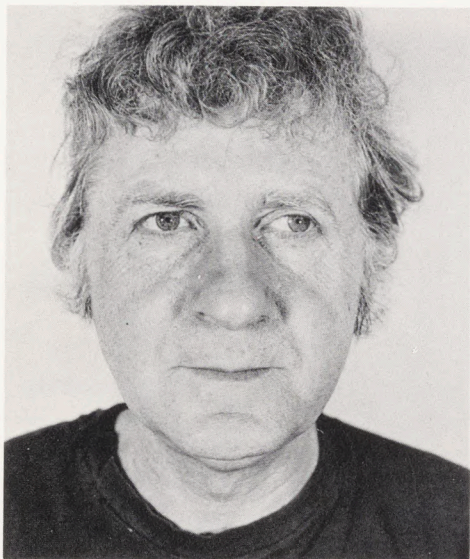
*Previously I had lived and worked in a house, a familiar domestic setting with familiar objects. But when I moved into my 'typical artist's studio' in Santa Monica, I had to buy props at the Goodwill and so on to have around to stimulate me. There was nothing there that looked like a house. So, I focused on myself more in this new environment because there was nothing else around that I could deal with in an amusing way.*

Generally speaking, Wegman's photographic works of this period can be divided into two basic categories. In the first are those that involve darkroom manipulation to produce odd transformations and disorienting perceptual illusions. Among these is *Family Combinations*, 1972, which consists of two rows of three photographs each. At the top are frontal, passport style mug shots of Wegman's father, his mother and himself. Beneath these are composite photographs of mother and father, mother and son, and father and son. The superimpositions of their faces are almost exactly congruent, the result being the creation of a composite ageless and sexless family face.<sup>11</sup> A similar vein is mined in the 1971 work *Lynn, Lynn/Terry, Terry*. Here individual portraits of identical twins flank a portrait of their "triplet"—a photographic clone Wegman brought to life in the darkroom by sandwiching the negatives of the twins' portraits.

Works in the second category are "straight" photographs that involve the use of props and reflect the growing interest in narrative that Wegman was developing as a result of working in video. In several images, printed captions function in a manner similar to the stories he tells in his tapes: they produce ironic twists on ordinary objects and situations. Without its caption, a curious shot of a pair of shoes protruding from beneath a sheet of masonite, propped against a wall, is only mildly amusing. The real laugh comes when we read the printed text: "To hide his deformity he wore special clothing."

11. Maud Lavin, "Notes on William Wegman," *Artforum*, March 1975, p. 46.









*Lynn, Lynn/Terry, Terry* 1971 Collection Courtney Sale and Steven J. Ross, New York

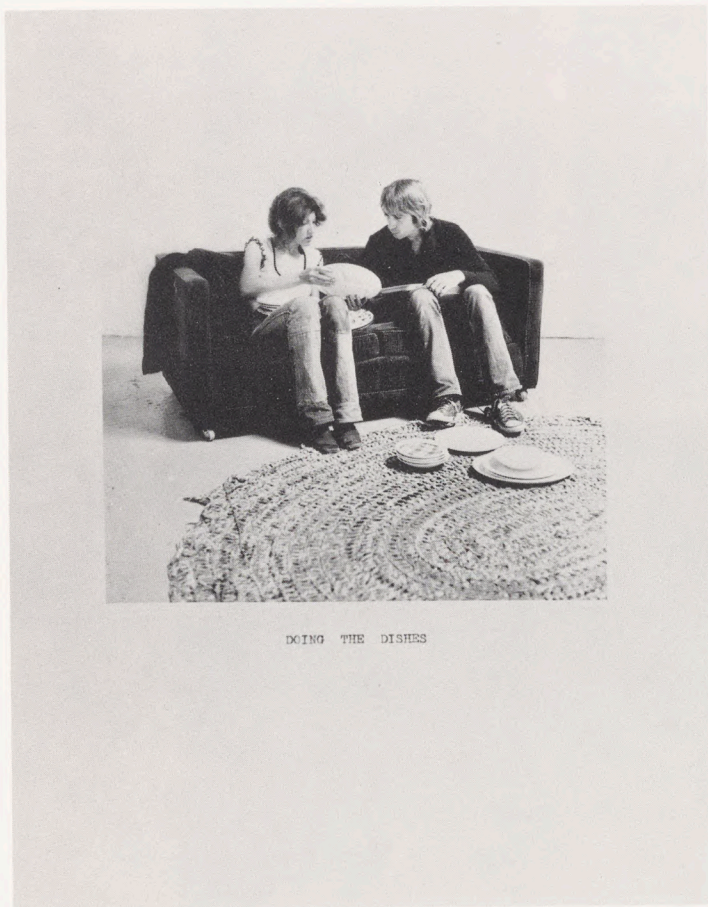


What Wegman presents in other photographs is essentially a different, usually ridiculous, but nonetheless genuinely different way of thinking about commonplace objects, everyday activities and the language we habitually use to describe them. *Doing the Dishes*, for example, shows Wegman and his wife seated on their living room sofa, examining their dinnerware, while *Home Entertainment: Music*, a title that conjures up images of a stereo turntable and speakers, shows Wegman doing his best to entertain his wife and dog with a living room impersonation of a rock star. In a related image titled *He Showed Her What He Made*, Wegman proudly displays an industrially fabricated dish drainer to his wife. The artist says this scene was intended as a bit of self-parody—he's never been much of a do-it-yourselfer—as well as a spoof on the typical basement hobbyist who builds, say, a model of the *Constitution*, and then runs upstairs to show his creation to his wife. It's tempting, however, to think of the dish drainer as a reference to one of Wegman's heroes, Marcel Duchamp, whose readymade sculptures include a rack for drying bottles.

This art world analogy would seem far-fetched were it not for the fact that such references abound in Wegman's work. He acknowledges, for example, that his "Stomach Song" videotape and a related diptych titled *Drinking Milk* were intended, at least in part, as spoofs of his navel-contemplating, California contemporaries who used their bodies as the raw material of their work. But the body artists are not the only ones to "get it in the neck" in Wegman's art; so do the minimalists. A 1972 work, *Stormy Night*, for example, satirizes a number of their attitudes and formal conventions. Here nine bland photographs set in a quintessential minimalist grid, depict Man Ray assuming various positions on that most minimal of minimalist objects—a rectangular box. From one row of photographs to the next the height of the box increases and Man Ray's pose becomes concomitantly more extreme and, ah . . . funny-looking. The humor in this parody of the minimalist's notion of serial progression can hardly be missed. Indeed, you can't help but wonder if Man Ray himself recognized the absurdity of the situation.

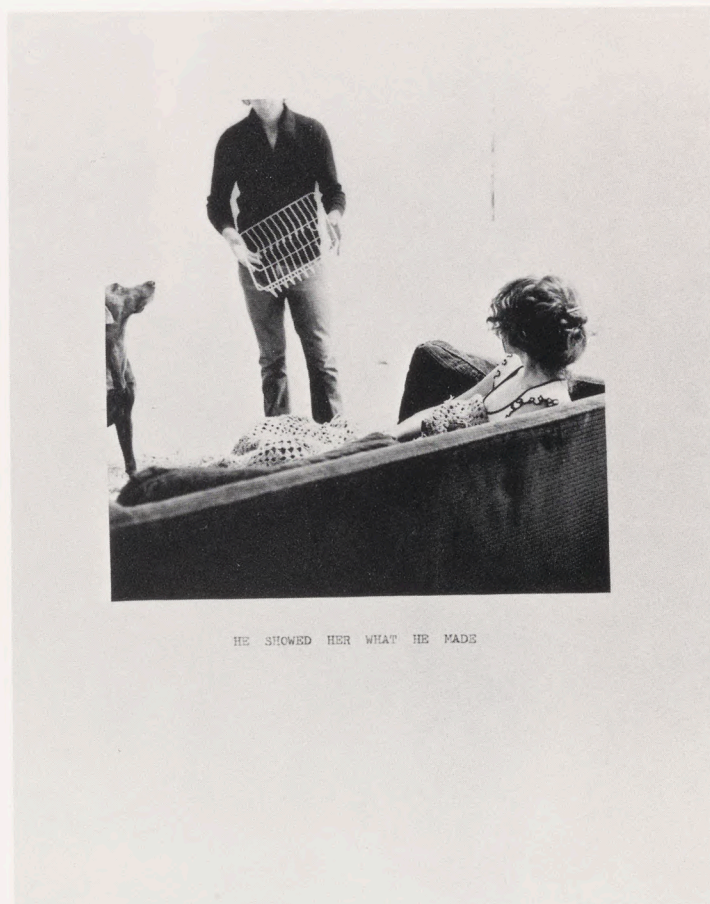
Superficially, many of Wegman's serial photo pieces bear affinities with the locomotion studies produced by Eadweard Muybridge in the late 19th century. They capitalize on the camera's stop-action capabilities and the power of sequential images to produce an almost cinematic sense of continuous movement through time and space. Consider, for example, the 1972 triptych, *Dropping Milk*. The first photograph shows Wegman holding a glass of milk; the second records the moment after he has released the glass which descends in a blur towards the floor. By all rights,





DOING THE DISHES

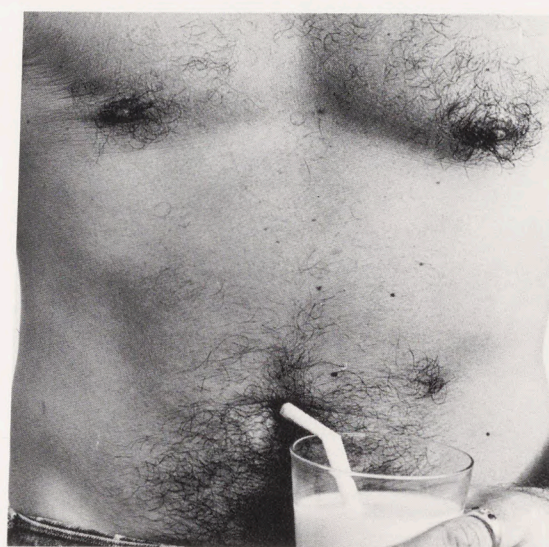
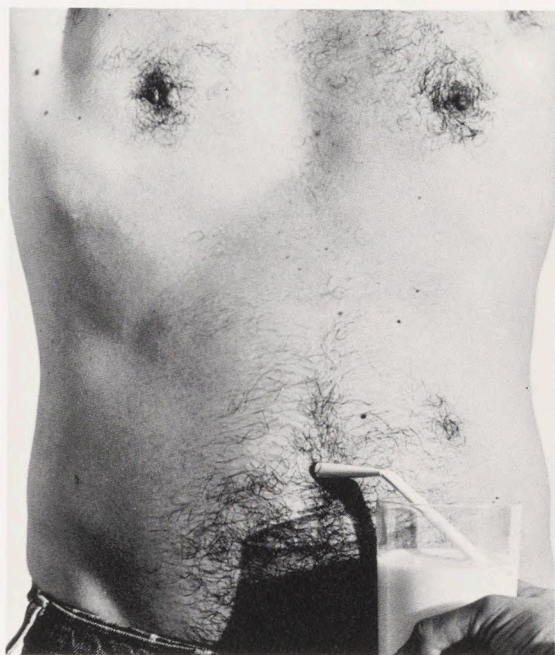
*Doing the Dishes* 1972  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York



HE SHOWED HER WHAT HE MADE

*He Showed Her What He Made* 1972  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





*Drinking Milk* 1971 Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York





*Stormy Night* 1972 Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York



we assume the third photo should show the glass smashed to pieces and a pool of milk on the floor and were it Muybridge who had taken these photographs it would. But it's Wegman at work here and as usual he throws us a curve: in the final image the glass stands upright, intact, its liquid contents undisturbed. Obviously, the triptych is a carefully contrived set-up, a photographic fiction. But because we are so accustomed to believe in photographs, the scene seems almost plausible.

Wegman is uncomfortable with the notion that his photographs might have surreal overtones. For some reason that implies self-indulgence and emotionalism, and as he says, he's always been attracted to "cooler art—Russian constructivism, for example." Indeed, the latent formalism of some of his photographs (as opposed to his videotapes which are decidedly off-hand) would seem to bear out this preference. Other pictures, however, belie this expressed intellectual stance. Works such as *Family Combinations* with its transmutations of identity and *Dropping Milk* with its photographic sleight of hand, produce a curious sense of dislocated reality in the viewer. Undeniably, there is something of the irrational about Wegman's photographic world.

• • •

In November 1972 Wegman moved to New York, lured there by an offer of a rent-free studio that never materialized. Eventually, however, he located two places to work—a studio in Manhattan and another in East Hampton—and he shuttled between them, spending weekends in the city and the rest of the time in the country.

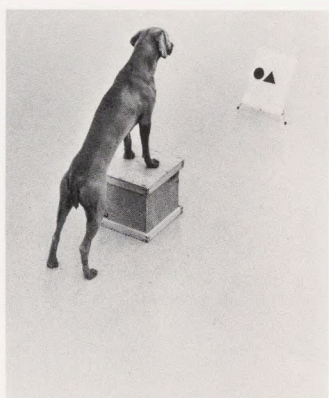
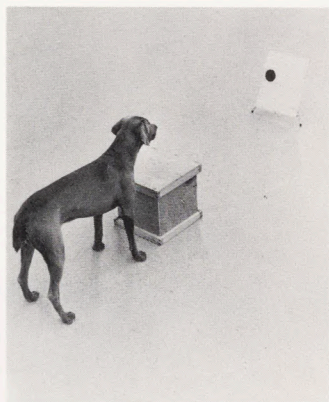
The East Hampton studio was a vast, abandoned computer parts factory. Here Wegman concentrated on video and photography, producing works that evidence the same wit and many of the same concerns as his earlier creations. By now he knew that in Man Ray he had not just a pet but an "art partner," and in several tapes he exploited the dog's completely predictable behavioral quirks to hilarious effect. In "Spelling Lesson," the artist gives the attentive hound a pithy critique of his homework. Reprimanded for misspelling "beach"—Man Ray had opted for b-e-e-c-h—the puzzled dog whines and apologizes for his error by licking Wegman's face. The humor in a 1972 serial photo piece titled *Before/On/After: Permutations* likewise arises from our tendency to interpret the dog's behavior in human terms. Here seven photographs set in a grid show Ray responding to geometric symbols on a chart by assuming different positions in relation to a wooden box. In the first row of pictures the symbols are presented to him one at a time: seeing a circle,





*Dropping Milk* 1972 Collection Mr. and Mrs. Morton Neumann, Chicago





*Before/On/After: Permutations* 1972 Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York



he stands behind the box; seeing a triangle, he mounts the box; seeing a square, he stands in front of the box. In the second row, the symbols are presented to him in pairs and he responds by placing first his front paws, then his back paws on the box and finally by straddling the box. Up to this point, Ray's performance, impressive as it is, could be interpreted as that of an extraordinarily well-trained Pavlovian specimen. Then comes the last picture where all three symbols are presented to him on the chart and he responds by placing just his left front and back paws on the box. His contorted pose is funny in and of itself. But it's all the more comical because, if only for a moment, we catch ourselves thinking that it is the result of a decision making process—one that involves imagination and creativity. Of course, to interpret Ray's behavior in such human terms is absurd; dogs just don't think that way. The performance is sheer sleight of paw and we know that Wegman has manipulated us, just as surely as he has manipulated Man Ray.

Several tapes made in East Hampton feature Wegman using simple props to illustrate a story. In one sequence, for example, he turns round and round in a swivel chair as he explains how he spent his day inspecting a rotating radar screen. In another, he holds up three saws to illustrate the plots of three movies he saw. A similar reliance on props and rudimentary mime characterizes several photographs of this period. Typical is *Sweeping* in which Wegman acts out all the possible interpretations of the word at once: cloaked in a sweeping swath of fabric and brandishing a push broom with a broad, sweeping gesture, he sweeps—literally and figuratively—across a sweeping expanse of his studio floor.

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The Manhattan studio was a cramped, inhospitable space that didn't lend itself well to either photography or video. Frustrated in his attempts to, as he says, "find interesting points of view to shoot from and a little tired of making photographs anyway," Wegman resorted to his childhood pastime—drawing.

Working feverishly, he made 40 drawings one day, thinking that he might exhibit them together as a single "piece." "But I felt like drawing the next day and the next day as well," he recalls and soon he was awash in a sea of sketches. Thoughts of a single "piece" slipped away and drawing became an activity that he did every day. Over the years he has continued this practice and today his sketches number in the thousands.



The tension between what we see and what we know, between the facts of a situation and how we interpret those facts is a persistent element in Wegman's art. In the two works illustrated here, Wegman relies on the peculiarities of camera vision to manipulate our credulousness. Initially the props in the photographs (the spike, croquet mallet, ball and wicket) appear to be palpable, three-dimensional objects. But a closer look reveals that they are, in fact, simply flat paper cut-outs.

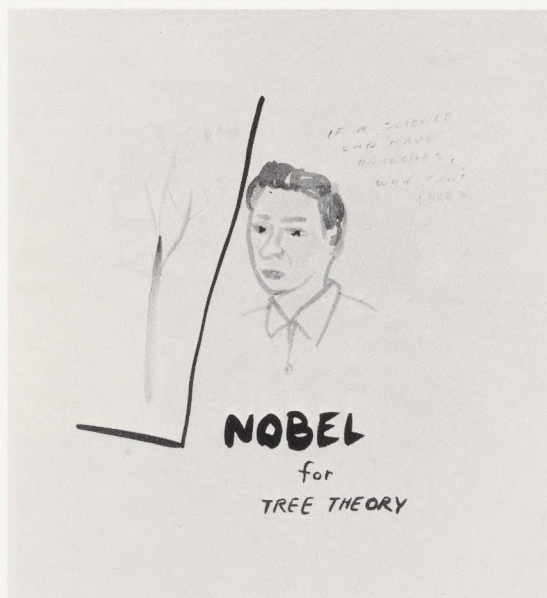






*Croquet* 1973 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





*Nobel for Tree Theory* 1978  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Wegman's drawings are rough distillations of ideas quickly dashed off, one to a page. Doodled in pencil or ink on standard letter-size bond, these naive, childlike renderings "capture the boyish whimsy that is the hallmark of Wegman's oeuvre."<sup>12</sup> Though infinitely more informal than his photographs, Wegman's drawings reflect certain similar preoccupations. Their humor is often a matter of unlikely comparisons and contrasts heightened by captions that reveal the disparity between the visual and verbal. Some are as simple as this: two circles on a page; one is labelled "circle," the other, "nothing." Others are more cartoon-like than conceptual. For example, in one, a Thurberesque toddler holds his parents hostage; in another, captioned "We are your friends," a phantom jet drops a huge Washington State apple over the rubble of a bombed-out city.

Occasionally Wegman reaches deeper within himself for more hallucinatory material, offering up, for example, a frail sketch of a diver with two minestrone cans as scuba tanks, captioned: "Drowned." Others are about logical absurdities and involve word play. One presents a portrait of the winner of the Nobel Prize for Tree Theory: "If a science can have branches, why can't trees?" In another, a schematic portrait of a woman is overlaid with a pseudo-philosophical text that reads: "If a stone is attracted to Baby Jane and it is denser than water than [sic] she must be awfully pretty and she will sink." Of course, as logical beings we are drawn into trying to make sense of all this nonsense. Wegman puts us through our paces and just as surely as his faithful companion Man Ray, we perform on cue. Once again, we are the artist's willing dupes.

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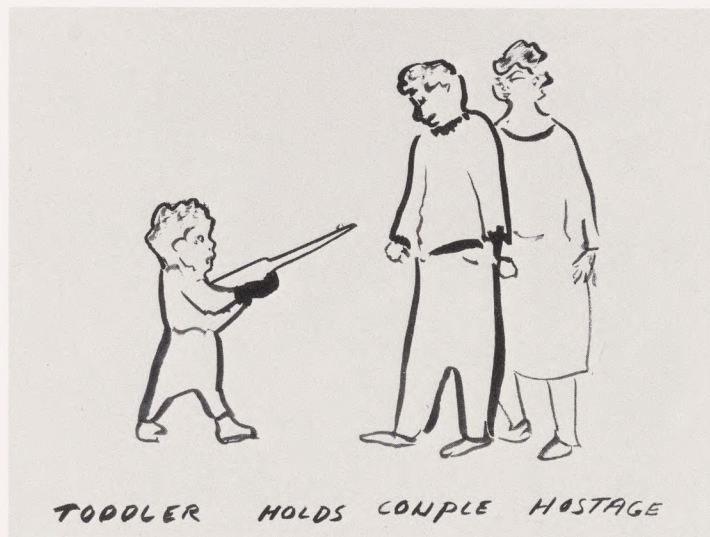
In 1976, using money from a Guggenheim fellowship, Wegman bought a Hasselblad camera and began photographing everything within range of his viewfinder. "It was just click! click! click!," he says. "It got to the point when every time I would sit down at my desk to draw there'd be a stack of photographs to move."<sup>13</sup>

Wondering what he would ever do with the mounting piles of prints, he began "altering" them: a few quick strokes of ink, and *voilà*, an overexposed photo of Man Ray becomes a picture of an animal who's now dog, now cat, depending upon whether you read the photographic information or the drawing. In another, a black hull-like shape transforms a prosaic shot of bare, vertical tree branches into a haunting image of a tall-masted schooner.

12. Marzorati, p 29.

13. Ibid.

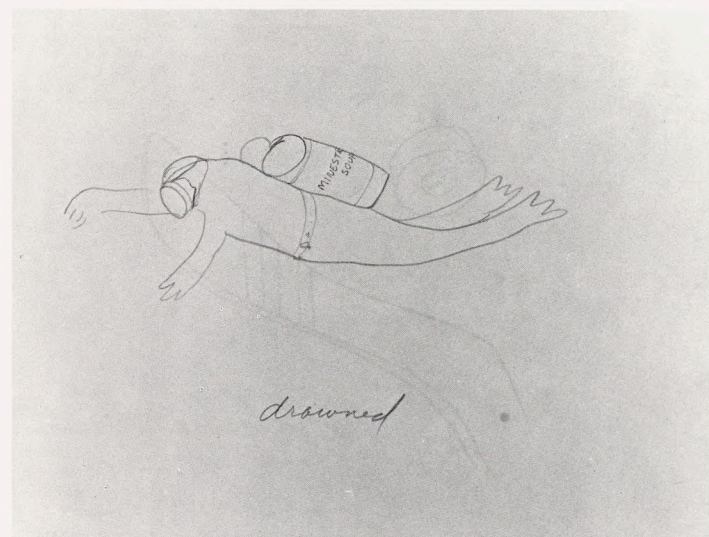




*Toddler Holds Couple Hostage* 1975  
Collection Holly and Horace Solomon, New York

*Washington State Friends* 1982  
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Drowned* 1974  
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





The altered photographs bear relationship to other aspects of Wegman's work. Like his drawings, they deliver their information with a minimum of contrivance, or as one writer put it, "as fast as a one-liner, as broadly as a cartoon."<sup>14</sup> Like his videotapes, the process of making them is largely a matter of improvisation and free association. Wegman never takes a photograph with a specific alteration in mind, rather with only the vaguest sense that a scene might have "potential." Then, studying the results of his "blind shootings," he makes graphic alterations in response to specific visual clues in the photographs themselves. Often it is the subtlest detail of an image that suggests a theme. For example, a picture titled *Home of Betty Grable* in which a pink-stockinged leg is visible through the window of a house was inspired by the star decoration on a lawn chair in the foreground of the shot. In other cases, Wegman capitalizes on printing errors, turning adversity to advantage. One of his most affecting altered photographs began with a developer-stained print of Man Ray. Outlining and partially inking over the print's mottled brown blotches, he "saved" an otherwise useless photograph and transformed it into a witty paint-by-numbers parody.

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In the summer of 1979, Wegman was invited by the Polaroid Corporation to use its large-format camera in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He initially resisted the offer, feeling that he had quite enough to do already: "I was making photographs; they took care of my need for making graphic things, composing things, dealing with formal issues. Video took care of my performance urge, my urge to be the life of the party without being at the party. The drawings let me just roam around almost any topic. So I wasn't terribly excited about going to Polaroid to use the camera; I didn't feel that I had any need for any more boxes to put my thoughts into." But the calls from Polaroid's consultant JoAnn Verburg persisted and ultimately Wegman gave in and drove up to Cambridge with Man Ray in tow.

Constructed of mahogany, the camera is an overgrown old-style view camera with a gigantic built-in Polaroid back. It works on the same principle as the familiar Polaroid camera invented by Dr. Edwin Land in 1947, producing 20 x 24 inch instant color prints on Polacolor professional film. The glossy photographs are products of a group enterprise. The artist sets up the shots; the studio supplies a technician to operate the camera, a film handler and a lighting specialist.<sup>15</sup>

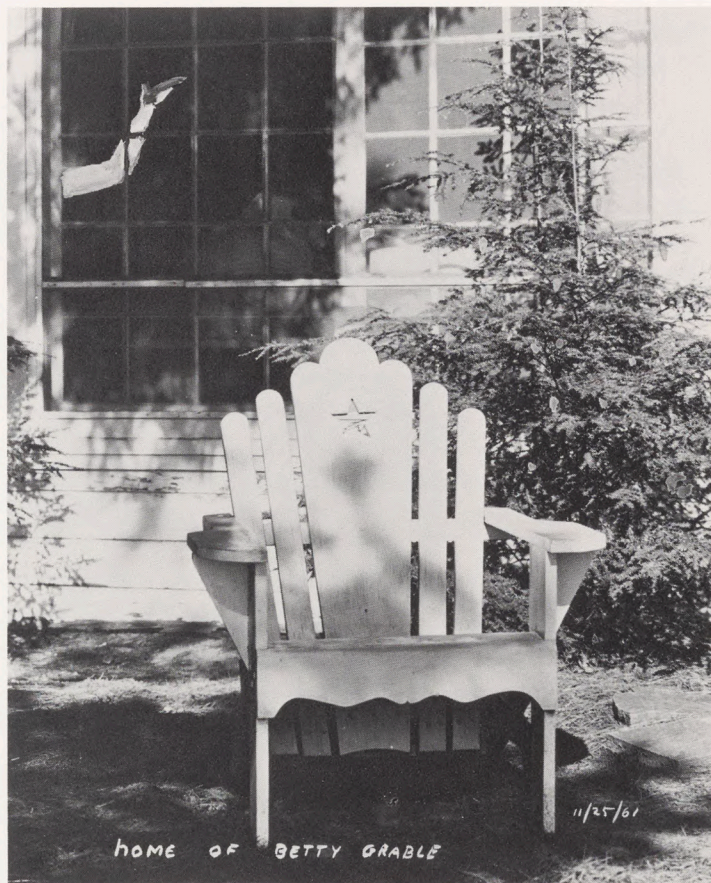
14. Ben Lifson, "Photography," *Village Voice*, April 16, 1979, p 87.

15. For detailed descriptions of the camera's history and technology see 20 x 24 *Polaroid* (Washington, D.C.: exh. cat., National Academy of Sciences, 1982) and Susan L. Brown, "Sandi Fellman: Against the Grain," *Camera Arts*, September 1982, pp 64-79.





*Ray Cat* 1979 from the portfolio *Improved Photographs*  
Collection the artist, courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York



*Home of Betty Grable* 1979  
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York



Aside from their stupendous size and high degree of resolution, 20 x 24 prints are distinguished from other color photographs by their vivid hues. The Polaroid Corporation is duly proud of these qualities and a room outside the Cambridge photo studio is festooned with astonishingly detailed photographs of brightly colored flowers. Wegman was initially put off by this cheery display and, perhaps a little perversely, decided that the subject of his first 20 x 24 prints would be Man Ray draped in a black cloth against a black backdrop.

Much to his surprise, the first shooting session was an experience "as exciting as getting my first video deck." He was particularly intrigued by the camera's instant feedback capability that he analogizes to video playback: it allows the artist immediately to see the work he has done. More important, as JoAnn Verburg observes, "feedback makes it possible for an artist to evaluate the consequences of his or her decisions shortly after making them . . . while the artist's intentions are still fresh in his or her mind. . . . Instant feedback seems in some situations to accelerate the creative process, and in others actually to alter the work. For often, after examining a print, an artist will make changes in subject matter or technique that give the next photograph more strength or clarity of purpose."<sup>16</sup>

Preparing for a visit to the studio, Wegman frequently makes quick sketches to develop ideas for shots. Then he sorts through his "fun trunk," a box loaded with toys, costumes, pieces of fabric and various homemade props, searching for items that he can put to good use in the pictures. Arriving at the studio, he may consult the sketches or improvise entirely new shots on the set. Occasionally he corrals the technicians or friends who have accompanied him to the studio—he jokingly refers to them as Wegman, Inc.—to serve as models. Paced by the 85-second developing time of an image, Wegman can make changes in each pose until he gets a picture that satisfies him—as few as one and occasionally as many as four in every twenty exposures. "The pictures come out like presents," says Wegman. "And usually I thank everybody—the studio crew, Dr. Land, Ray—when the day is over."<sup>17</sup>

Wegman's Polaroids are imbued with the same quirky humor and reflect many of the same concerns as his works in other media. But as Laurance Wieder points out, they are perhaps most immediately related to his videotapes. Diptychs and triptychs tell spare stories while in single photographs Wegman manages to condense the extended conceits of video performances into one elegantly composed picture. Unlike grainy video images, however, the glossy color prints have the presence and uniqueness of paintings.<sup>18</sup>

16. JoAnn Verburg, "Afterword," in *20 x 24/LIGHT* (New York: LIGHT Gallery, The Philadelphia College of Art and Polaroid Corporation, 1980).

17. Wieder, p. 9.

18. Ibid.





*Bring Me the Head of a Big Boy* 1981  
Collection Richard Grossman, Minneapolis

Wegman's fascination with metamorphosis, explicit in his manipulated and altered photographs, is given even more direct expression in his Polaroid portraits of Man Ray. Items selected from the fun trunk produce curious transformations: gold tinsel garlands turn the Weimaraner into an Airdale; with a spritz of green Disco Dazzle hair spray, scuba flippers on his paws and Ping-Pong balls over his eyes, the dog becomes a frog. Occasionally, Wegman does even more with even less. *Ray Bat*, for example, is simply a photograph of Man Ray lying on his back, with a lamp and a bouquet of flowers suspended upside down from the studio ceiling in a corner of the frame. Other pictures reflect Wegman's ongoing preoccupation with comparisons and contrasts. Among these is a diptych, in each half of which Man Ray appears in profile, completely enveloped in a fake fur costume. On one side he is dressed in "leopard skin" and is set against a zebra backdrop; on the other side the patterns are reversed.

In his Polaroids Wegman also continues to play the sixties-seventies art game of "insisting on the aesthetic legitimacy of lightweight content."<sup>19</sup> Like his predecessors, the Pop artists, he frequently chooses as his subjects banal items drawn from the consumer culture world. Thus, to some degree his photographs of cheap plaster statuettes ("nebishes") sprayed with gold paint recall Jasper Johns's bronze ale cans, while a picture of a Big Boy doll (a restaurant chain's corporate mascot) suggests comparison with Roy Lichtenstein's paintings of comic book characters and Andy Warhol's graphic apotheoses of Campbell's soup cans.

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In January 1982, as Man Ray approached the ripe old age of 12, his health began to fail. Recognizing that his art partner had only a few months to live, Wegman concentrated exclusively on making pictures of his pet. While earlier he had dressed the dog in zany costumes and disguises, now he attempted some serious portraits. "I wanted to capture Ray's nobility," Wegman says. And capture it he did in a series of dazzling Polaroid prints. These over-life-size portrait heads of Ray, his coat tinted with faintly iridescent dyes in shades of blue, red or silver, are poignant studies of the dog's elegant physiognomy. Confronting these astonishingly detailed, tactile images is a direct experience. The head's large scale and sober countenance are riveting. Intense and moody, the pictures are a fitting tribute to the stoic Weimaraner's central position in Wegman's art.

19. Ann Lee Morgan, "Chicago Letter," *Art International*, May-June, 1982, p. 102.





*Fey Ray* 1979 Collection Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Strauss, Denver, Colorado





Wegman and friend at work on *Fey Rey* in Polaroid's Cambridge photo studio.



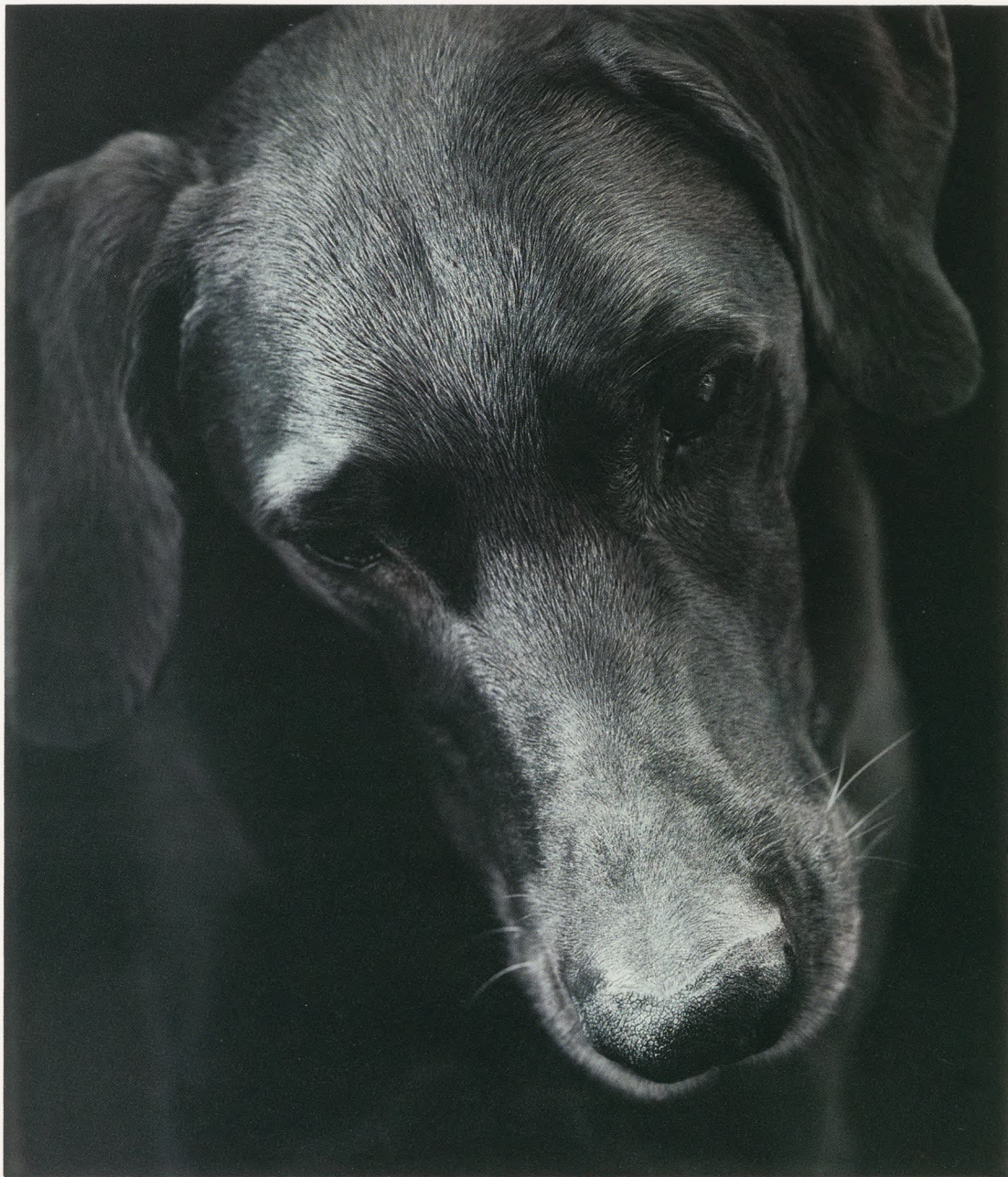
A similarly respectful tone prevails in a portfolio of eight black and white and two dye-transfer portraits that Wegman recently published as an homage to his ever-photogenic pet who died on 27 March 1982. Spanning the last ten years of their collaboration, the pictures are Wegman and Ray at their brilliant best. Some, such as *Monument*, a view of the noble Weimaraner poised on a concrete base, and *Of the Lake* in which his elegant form is silhouetted against a light-dappled pond, are sentimental recollections of the artist's best friend. Others are imbued with the gentle whimsy that has long been a key ingredient of Wegman's art. Among these is a picture of Ray gazing with rapt attention at a clay bust of himself—an amusing twist on the centuries-old tradition of the *memento mori*.

Though the portfolio prints are radically different in scale from Wegman's Polaroids—none is larger than 7 x 7 inches—they share with them several important qualities. Nothing has been left to chance in the pictures. Each image has been tightly structured with extraordinary care and attention paid to details of pose and lighting. Rich in tonality and impeccably printed, they are poles apart from the grainy black and white photographs Wegman produced in the early 70s.

Technically and stylistically, the portfolio prints may well mark the beginning of a new direction in Wegman's photography. Clearly, he has fallen under the medium's spell and, in fact, he acknowledges that he has recently become interested in the work of such masters of traditional photography as Weston and Strand. Once an artist who made photographs, is Wegman now a photographer who makes art? I think not. Rather, he seems to be in the enviable position of straddling the abyss between those two camps. Elusive as ever, he continues to be, in a word, an anomaly. And in another, an original.

Indeed, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Wegman is an important presence in the art world. Technology has little mystique for him, though he is now widely recognized as a master of video and photography. By his interest in words and images, his work bears relationship with that of the conceptual artists. But his results are anything but dry and theoretical. Rather, he has opted to create humorous works and, in so doing, he has driven a wedge into the modernist academy. He has opened art to areas of personal expression that, for too long, were considered taboo. His ability to "get a laugh" has in no way diminished his very real seriousness and importance as an artist, however. In fact, his humor, his irony, his idiosyncratic vision are at the center of his art. Those smiles that Wegman's works so often provoke are smiles of recognition, smiles of understanding.





Silver Triptych 1982 (detail) Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York



# A Man Ray Portfolio

From the start, Wegman knew that Man Ray was no ordinary dog. "When we picked him out of the litter in Long Beach," he recalls, "he acted strange and distant compared to the other puppies. Later we found out why: he had swallowed a beach ball."

Between 1970 and 1982 Wegman and Ray collaborated on literally hundreds of photographic and video projects. "He did help with a couple of drawings, too," says the artist. What was his fascination with Ray? "Initially, I just thought that he looked good on video. But the more I used him, I found that he had terrific presence. He really was a ham and acted a little lost if he wasn't on camera. In fact, I remember a period a few years ago when I worked alone in the darkroom on some drawings. Ray just sulked and wandered around the studio restlessly, stopping at the darkroom door occasionally just to glare at me."

As any human model will vouch, holding a pose is hard work. But since Weimaraners are a working breed, Ray eagerly and instinctively took to the task. Besides, so devoted was he to Wegman that he gladly tolerated all sorts of minor irritations for the sake of his master's love and attention. A real trooper who relished being the star of the show, the pooch didn't mind being sprinkled with flour as he was in the ethereal light-suffused Polaroid *Dusted* or being showered with paper as he was in *Floor Piece*, a witty send-up of Wegman's early installation works. Ray actually enjoyed being wrapped in fake fur as in *Leopard/Zebra, Zebra/Leopard*. So it's hardly surprising that he looked forward to the numerous fitting sessions required when the artist Robert Kushner designed seven costumes for him. (Wegman had simply asked him to design a fancy leash for Ray, but Kushner got carried away.) As Laurance Wieder observes, Ray apparently liked some of Kushner's costumes better than others: he was particularly delighted with his French cap, pantaloons and garter, but only tolerated his feathery Polynesian garb.\*

With Ray as an ever willing model, Wegman could spend considerably more time perfecting a shot than

if he had used human models who tend to get impatient and, well, talk back. Furthermore, Wegman feels that his familiarity with his canine subject freed him to concentrate more specifically on certain formal and technical investigations. He became particularly fascinated with the peculiarities of Polaroid color discovering, among other things, that a bright grass green when recorded on Polacolor II film takes on a pale, metallic cast. Wegman capitalized on this quirk of chemistry in several pictures. For example, he relied on it to heighten the sculptural look of a crumpled piece of backdrop paper wrapped around Ray in an untitled diptych that he calls his "John Chamberlain piece".

Over the years Man Ray became a media celebrity as famous in some circles as Morris the Cat, Rin Tin Tin and Lassie. He appeared not only on the covers of several serious art journals, but on the *Tonight* show, *Saturday Night Live* and David Letterman's *Late Night* television program. While the hound took his fame in stride, Wegman admits that there were times when he resented the fact that people on the street often recognized the dog rather than the artist. But he is quick to add that Ray often served as a handy social aid. "He takes a lot of pressure off me," Wegman once said. "It's like having a third person in a conversation; one of you doesn't have to talk all the time. He's sort of a permanent excuse."

Which leads us to speculate about another issue: did Wegman regard Ray as an alter ego of sorts? Not exactly forthcoming on this point, he simply says that by using Ray he was able to diffuse the narcissism that is so often an element of conceptually-oriented video and photography. That may be so, yet it is undeniable that Ray often appears as a surrogate for human presence in Wegman's work. With an economy of gesture perfectly suited to video and photography and an appealing, deadpan face you can't forget once you've seen it, Ray was a natural-born comedian, a four-legged vehicle for Wegman's own quirky humor and intelligence. LL

\* in *Man's Best Friend* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982), p 8.





*Floor Piece* 1980 Collection Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Morton Rapp





*Untitled* 1980 Private Collection









*Polynesian* 1980 Collection Laura Carpenter, Delahunty Gallery, Dallas





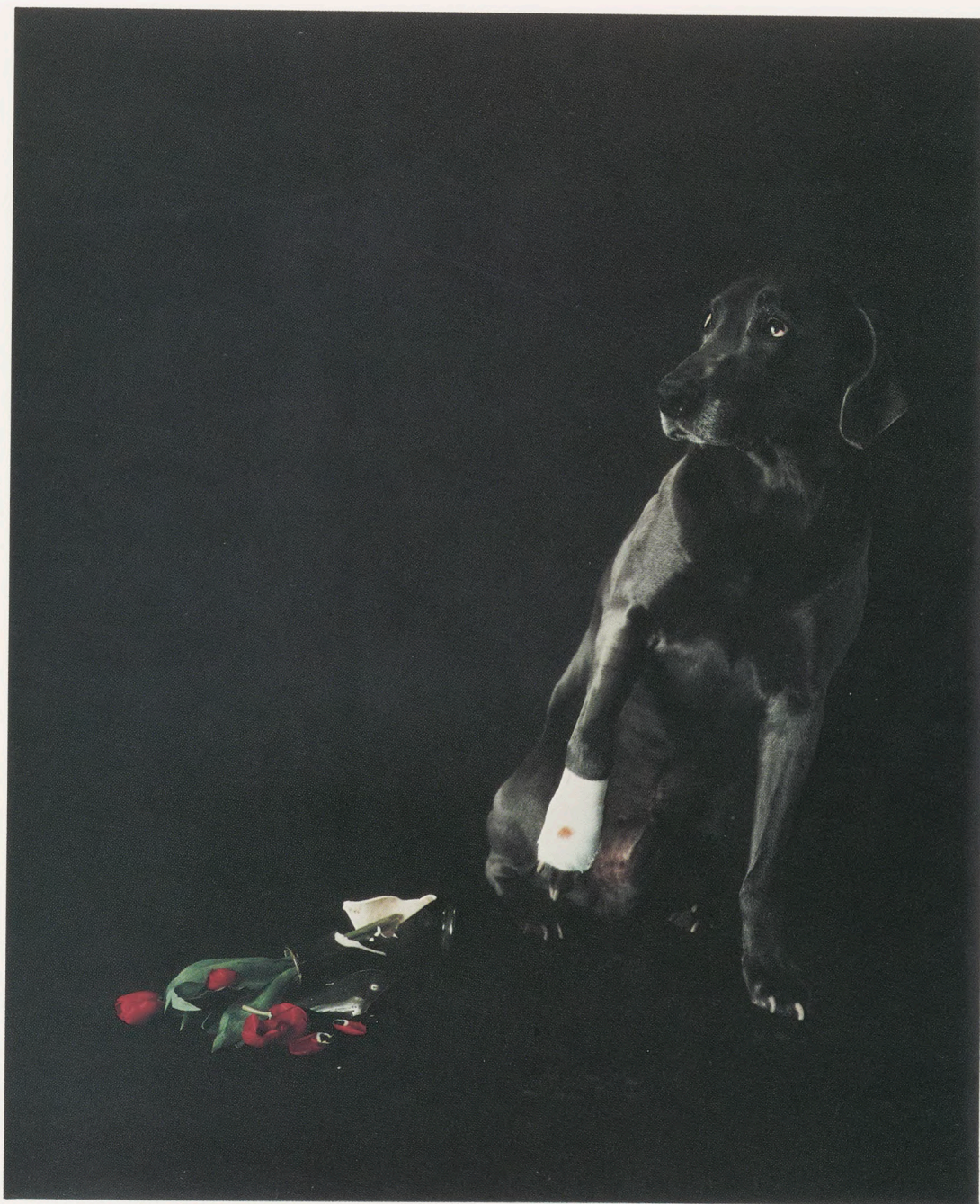
*French* 1980 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





*FROG/frog* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





*Broken/Hurt* 1981 Collection Will Hokin, Chicago





*Garden* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York









*Leopard/Zebra—Zebra/Leopard* 1981 Collection Sherry and Alan Koppel, Chicago









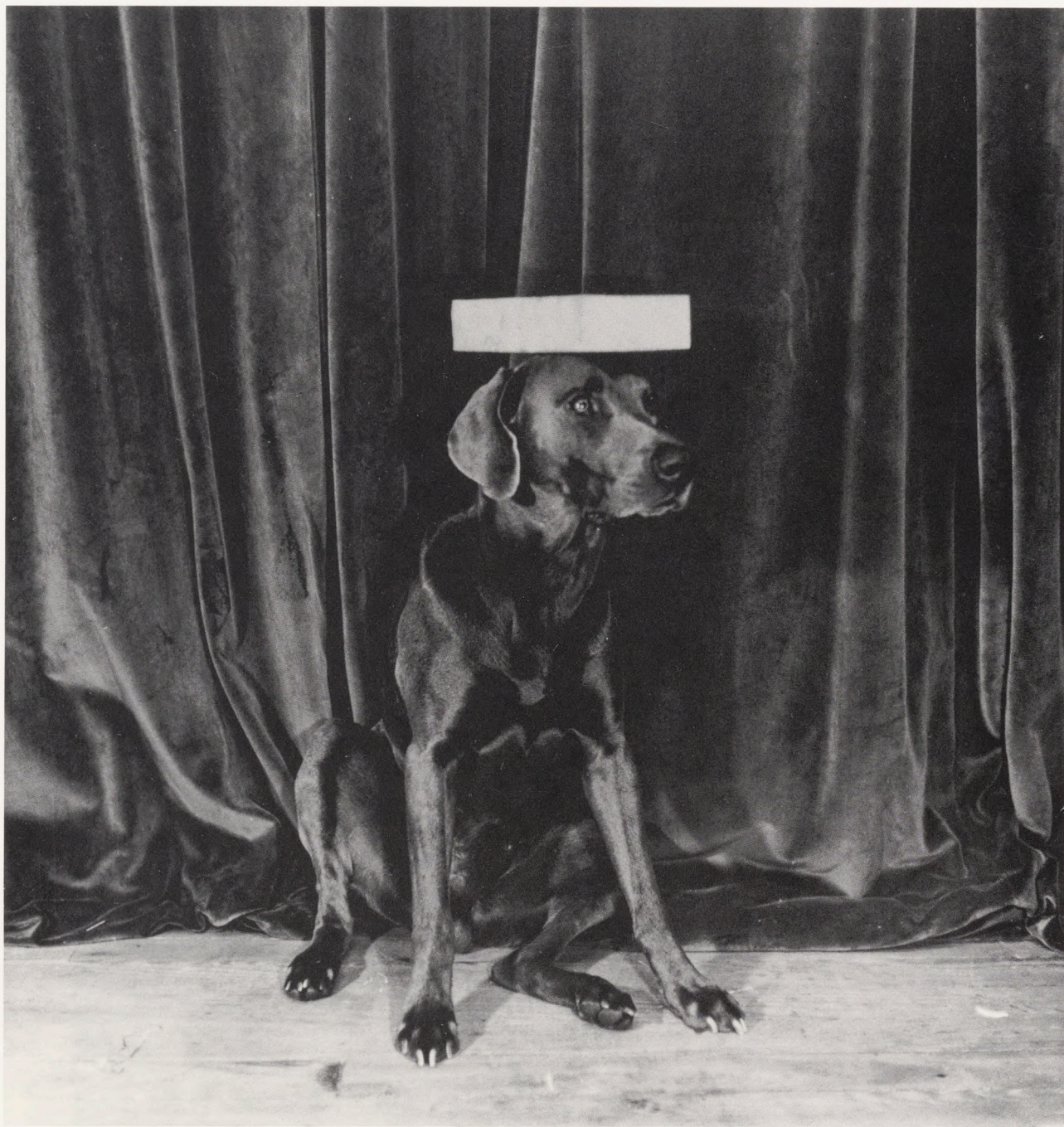
*Blue Boy* 1980 Collection Andrew and Betsy Rosenfield, Chicago





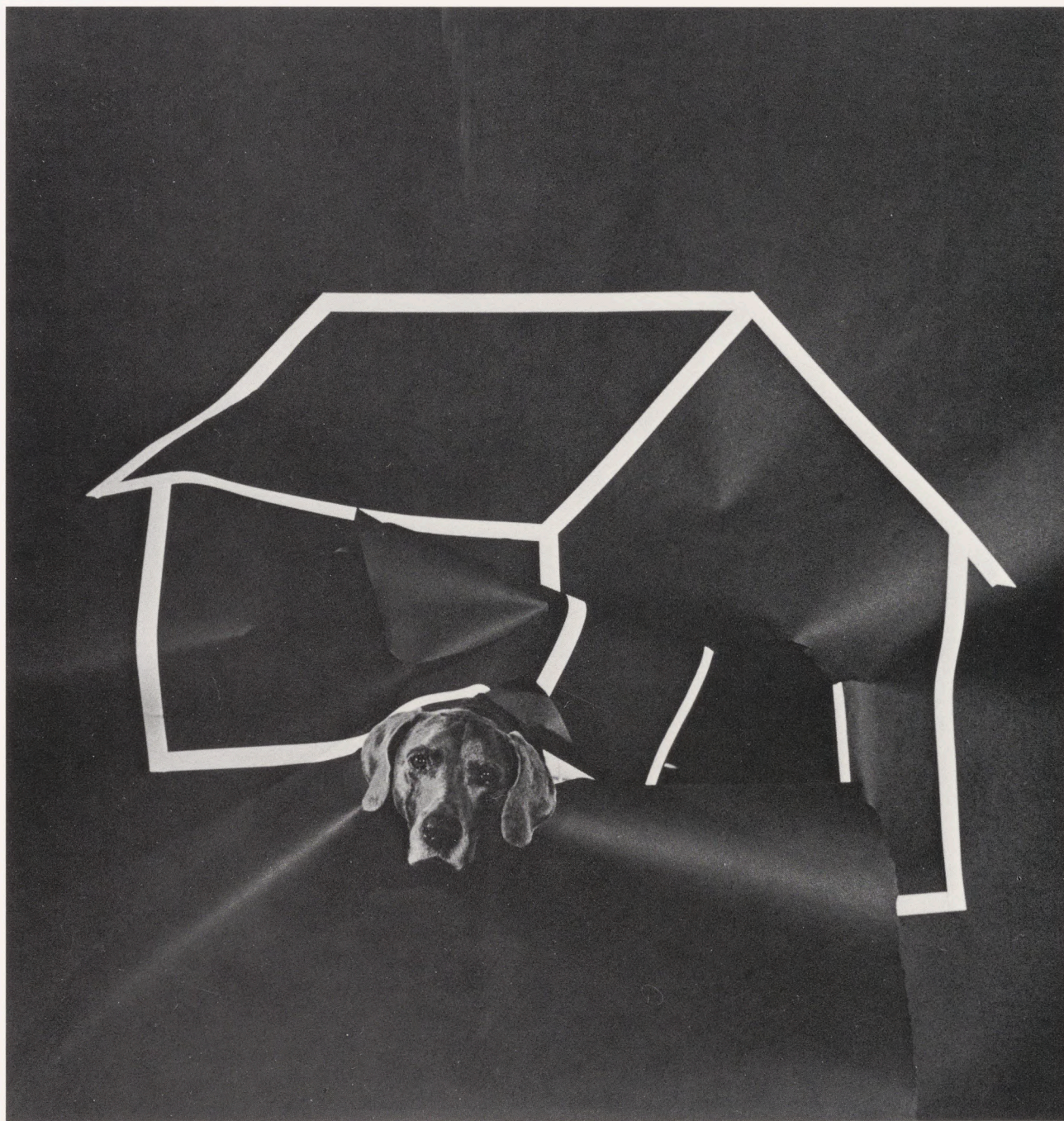
Bookends 1981 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





*Modeling School* 1974 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York





*Dog House* 1981 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York





*Elephant* 1981 Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco





Ray Bat 1980 Private Collection





*Of the Lake* 1976 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York





*Dog Cabin* 1979 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982 Courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York





*Dino Ray* 1981 Collection Will Hokin, Chicago





*Dusted* 1982 Collection Gifford Myers, Altadena, California



# Wegman's Video: Funny Instead of Formal

Kim Levin

William Wegman's video work is full of booby traps. If you crack jokes—and the temptation is to make quips about man and dog, Wegman and Man, Bill and Ray—they never quite match Wegman's own inarticulate humor, or his dog's comic eloquence. And if you expound on his work seriously you risk sounding ridiculous. Wegman's own insistently idiotic cornball stance rubs off on our words. By playing the fool, he reduces us all to blathering idiots. No wonder critics writing about his work often resort to the form of the interview. It's not that we look at his goofy videotapes with any sense of superiority; rather, with dumbstruck wonder, with smiling acquiescence, with puzzled delight, with vague discomfort and with pleasure. Somehow he manages to deny not only his own critical faculties but ours too. He overrides what used to be called the superego. That's no mean feat.

But let's start with a brief description. Two nearly identical dogs—one of them Wegman's own faithful Weimaraner, Man Ray—sit side by side facing the camera. They perform nearly identical movements. They turn their heads, roll their eyes, twist their necks in almost perfect unison. They're like puppets, mesmerized by some unseen force. A doggy duo, a canine version of the Bobbsey Twins or the Rockettes, absolutely transfixed. The choreography is as exquisite as it is absurd. After a few seconds, we realize that they're visually tracking some moving object with total concentration. That's all. And that's all that happens, except once, just when we've become perfectly conditioned to their twinned actions, there's a twist: the dogs thwart our expectations by suddenly swiveling their heads in opposite ways, only to end up focused on the same point in space. For some reason that moment is excruciatingly





*Duet*

funny, maybe because the dogs' momentary confusion mirrors our own: we're the ones who have been reacting, as we watched, like Pavlov's dogs. And at the end we get our reward—a quick glimpse of the moving object as it passes, as if accidentally, into view. It is a tennis ball Wegman has been waving in front of the dogs. Not just the dog lover's ploy, the prelude to "Go fetch," but the absolutely simple old-fashioned portrait photographer's trick—"Watch the birdie." Except instead of a box camera, Wegman is using video equipment.

Modest, black and white, of unremarkable technical quality, scarcely longer than a TV commercial, this piece might seem unexceptional. He's done little more than illustrate a time-worn visual cliché, a trick of the trade of the hack photographer—using dogs instead of babies, carrying things a little further, and exposing his own off-screen trick. And yet, this double dog dance, which he made in 1975, may be Wegman's video masterpiece. Or maybe it's just my personal favorite because it was the first of his video works I ever saw and the first work of video art I had seen that didn't depend on an aesthetic of boredom. Like the rest of the video pieces he made between 1970 and 1978, it's very short. It's hard to pin down why it works, or what relationship it bears to fine art or to commercial TV. Wegman's video art doesn't lend itself to formal analysis. It doesn't present itself as an art of ideas. Perhaps, then, the first thing to say about Wegman's video is that it plays dumb.

"It completely simplified my life when I got into video. I stopped thinking about floors and ceilings and walls," says Wegman. He got into video in 1969 while teaching at the University of Wisconsin. As he tells it, "My paintings got flatter and flatter and turned into sculpture: floors, environments. I was rearranging the furniture. I was floating styrofoam word pieces down the Milwaukee River. I floated a hundred commas down the river. I made a word piece combining every four letter dirty word you could think of." Those word pieces weren't exactly the Duchampian puns popular with other artists at that time. His indoor floor pieces weren't the usual post-minimalist "scatter works" either. Instead of emphasizing raw materials and natural substances, they had, Wegman says, "some sort of formal flip using non-raw materials—doors instead of wood, nails instead of steel, something that already had some history to it. There were size differences, for example, big and little pots and pans."

Wegman documented these temporary pieces with photographs. The photographs led to photo pieces: the initial impulse was documentation. "Video had a more mesmerizing effect. I started playing with it." And on video those formal flips looked more like the old switcheroo. "When



you put them in time, automatically big and little, inversions, shifts and structures come out funny instead of formal," he explains. "As soon as I got funny I killed any majestic intentions in my work."

In 1970 he moved to California, really got into video and bought a 35 dollar dog. Between 1970 and 1978 he made thousands of video works, and with few exceptions, none was longer than a minute or so.<sup>1</sup> He describes his early tapes as "innocent." He says they were often "an action, a simulation, and a combination of the two. Those little math numbers made me feel I was doing real art. My first tape took two years to make and I didn't know how to edit. Each time there's a different reel, there's a technical change—a new camera, a better microphone, different equipment. In the first reel I couldn't focus more than six feet so everything was close up. I had a twelve dollar microphone so there wasn't much talking. I really went downhill when I started adding too much equipment too fast."<sup>2</sup>

In one of his early tapes, Wegman crawls backwards on all fours away from the screen. Drooling milk, he leaves a white liquid line on the floor. He exits and Man Ray walks in, licking up the line of milk as he advances until his nose fills the screen. It doesn't pay to scrutinize Wegman's video works too closely: it falsifies their intentions which are most of all purely visual and improvised. But this "little math number" could be a comment on floor works, and on the way line was being made actual by artists in the late 60s. It could also have to do with psychological reversals: dog takes nourishment, man makes art. Whatever it is, it's captivating. Wegman simply comments that the video quality is more "milky" than a Portapak, which has sharper contrast. "I never used the Portapak. I always had the monitor on. I never wrote scripts. I would just pass something in front of the camera and see what I would do with it. The second take is usually the one."

It's possible that milk appealed to Wegman for its connotations of infantile regression, but another tape from *Reel 1* makes it clear that for him, pouring a white line equaled drawing. This tape shows Wegman drinking milk, but instead of pouring down his throat, it pours visibly down in a straight white line in front of him, missing his mouth. In a tape from *Reel 5*, Man Ray laps up a glass of milk with his tongue.<sup>3</sup> He's sloppy about it, painterly. Says Wegman: "It's like a painting. Why I stopped painting is I couldn't tell whether the paint should be thick or thin. A real painter knows that." But in his video, he's solved another painterly question: when is the work finished? Wegman's tapes, using real time and actual sound, stop when the incident is over. And if there's any illusion, it's always exposed.

All quotes are from a conversation with the artist, summer 1982.

1. There are seven 20 minute reels of *Selected Works*, plus a recently selected alternate to *Reel 1*. Reels 1 through 3 were made in California. "I moved to New York during *Reel 4*," Wegman says. There is also a 10 minute *Anthology* of his work from 1977–78; four longer tapes (*Semi Buffet*, *Gray Hairs*, *The Accident Tape* and *Man Ray Man Ray*); and a reel that is a compilation of his greatest hits, called *The Best of Wegman*. He has also made one film, *The Bubble Gum Film*. It is three and one half minutes long. In it, a little girl blows a very big bubble and the bubble bursts.

2. On the other hand, the early equipment had its drawbacks. Wegman's first video pieces, made in Wisconsin on Craig equipment, can't be replayed. Wegman explains: "The half inch equipment wasn't uniform yet. The camera signal was mixed up and it only worked on one particular deck. Real quirky stuff you ran into back then. No one knew the industry was going to develop into Betamax." Reels 2–5, made on a Sony 3600, can't be time based corrected for copying, and have to be shot off a monitor. Previous to *Reel 1*, Wegman made a reel in California before he got Man Ray. Shown in Pomona in 1970, it was accidentally erased.

3. Wegman tends to return to various household props, doing variations on related themes. Milk is only one of these. ("I use milk because it looks good," says Wegman. He also likes the phrase "spilt milk.") There is also a tape on which he drinks a glass of water and talks about swimming. Related to this is another on which he sits with his feet in a bucket of water, listing his material possessions. "The only thing I don't have is a swimming pool," he concludes.





Milk Floor Piece



Stomach Song

Another early tape known as “Stomach Song” is a close-up of Wegman seated, barechested, his torso filling the screen. As he breathes in and out, the torso resembles a rudimentary face: nipples for eyes, navel for mouth. Wegman puts words in the mouth. “Hey you,” says the navel, “Hoo hoo hoo hoo hum.” He raises his arms and the torso’s face, altered, raises its voice an octave, creating a duet between the deep-voiced torso and the falsetto one. “I wouldn’t have done that if I wasn’t working in California with my shirt off and the monitor on,” he remarks.<sup>4</sup> “There was something yucky called Body Art back then, remember that?”

Another tape from *Reel 1*: A photographer’s lamp says, “Hey mom, I think Randy’s gonna be sick.” A second photographer’s lamp tips over. Why? “It looked like a sad character,” Wegman says. But a theme begins to emerge. Wegman anthropomorphizes his dog, his torso, his work lamps. They all acquire human characteristics and do human things—the sort of things a child might imagine. As if Wegman, starting with nothing but his bare room and his blank screen, has decided to play let’s pretend, aimlessly amusing himself out of pure boredom. But that was the condition laid down by Minimalism and Conceptualism, and by Andy Warhol’s films such as *Empire*. Boredom was the given of video art in those years; it wasn’t supposed to be enjoyable. That was what distinguished it from real TV.

Then there’s a tape that’s a still life of sorts: a book and a dead fish. The book is by Borges. The fish recites the text, but it takes a moment to realize that the fish’s mouth is moving, mouthing the words.<sup>5</sup> Add to the anthropomorphizing a further wrinkle: the animation of the inanimate object as well as the personification of non-human form. Impersonation is part of it: the dog Man Ray impersonates Wegman, becoming an alter ego for the abdicating artist, just as the fish impersonates the absent author.

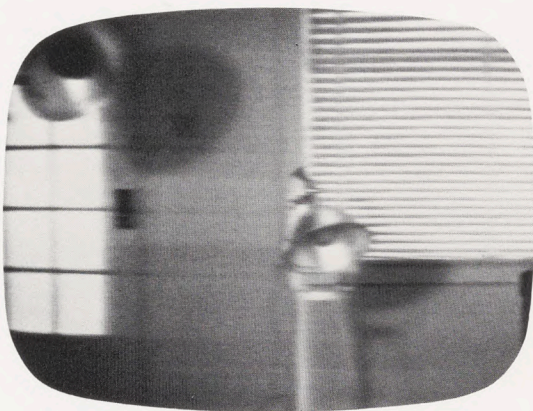
Another. Wegman enters, covered with handbags that hang from his arms and legs. He divests his body of one handbag after another. A puzzling tape: is he playing bag lady, confounding male and female, or is he the sorcerer’s apprentice, multiplying something that only makes sense as a single thing, casting off something meant to be clung to? “I just went to Goodwill and bought forty pocketbooks and brought them home. The man takes them off as if they’re his workclothes. The first narrative things are very sketchy that way.”

A similar activity carried to extremes takes place in his mock deodorant commercial on *Reel 3*. An underarm close-up: Wegman sprays deodorant in a continual stream while extolling the deodorant’s virtues.

4. The California sensibility is relevant to his work, even though, as Wegman points out, it was Man Ray who came from California and not himself. Nevertheless, Californian qualities of laid-back informality and easy familiarity seem to have rubbed off on his work. His video art has more in common with the work of Bruce Nauman and John Baldessari than it does with any video art of the same time in the east.

5. From “Anet and Abtu,” in *The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Borges.





Two Lamps



Anet and Abtu

It's only a minute or so long but it seems as if it will never stop. Eventually the deodorant is running in rivulets from his armpit, a TV cliché gone askew. The sorcerer's apprentice again, but the multiplication—or exaggeration—takes place in the realm of real time rather than actual objects.

In a piece that he calls his “Mies van der Rohe tape,” Wegman, playing TV pitchman, gives a demonstration of “the new massage chair.” What we see is a plain, old tubular steel kitchen chair. “It works on the same principle as a tuning fork,” says the pitchman. He demonstrates, sitting on the chair and hitting it with a stick.<sup>6</sup> The do-it-yourself technical aspects of the work infiltrate the narrative here, as do the false promises of TV commercials. Wegman's tapes are full of false promises: see one thing, say another. There's always some discrepancy, some unbridgeable gap between what's going on and what's being said, between what we are led to expect and what we get. Wegman's humor has a large quotient of frustration in it. His wonderfully puzzling nonsense conveys and hides a great deal of psychological sense.

The psychological content of Wegman's humor is sometimes overt. In a tape on *Reel 3* known as “Rage and Depression,” Wegman sits with a silly fixed smile on his face, and talks about being given shock treatment because of fits of rage. Smiling all the while, he describes the shock therapy, the result of which was a permanent smile: he's still depressed only it no longer shows. This pseudo-confessional tape isn't just goofily funny. This piece too deals with false promises and deceiving appearances—discrepancies between visible surfaces and the invisible depths, and failures of intentions on the way to results. Wegman's tapes may be sight gags but they're also double binds—quixotic illustrations of what lies at the roots of schizophrenic behavior as well as consumer dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, that may be reading too much into his deadpan art. He might simply be saying that what counts is the surface effect. By equating the meaningless form of an upturned mouth with a happy expression, he is making connections between being “formal” and being “funny.”

The implications of an art that is funny instead of formal are more complex than simply a switch of emphasis toward psychological content (and viewer response) and away from structural form. “Formal”—whether in the sense of formality or formalism—and “funny” have something in common: both require detachment, both take the long

6. Wegman admires the video work of Bruce Nauman, and it is interesting that Nauman's recent sculptural installation *D.E.A.D.* was a hanging chair which acted as a tuning fork when struck at designated spots, clanging the notes D, E, A, and D. Whether this is coincidence or acknowledgement of mutual admiration, or whether they both refer to some popular source remains to be seen.





Pocketbook Salesman



Deodorant

view. Both can be means of distancing, disengaging mind, hand, or eye from the immediate involvements of reality, subjectivity and the world of appearances. Slipping on a banana peel isn't funny when you're involved. In Wegman's very informal work, humor may well be a substitute for formalism, shifting our attention from subject to object. For as he humanizes his dog and animates inanimate objects, he also reverses the process, depersonalizing himself, impersonating defective patterns of behavior—using himself as a comic object.

• • •

Wegman's working process starts with an empty screen, a blank monitor, an open mind. Whatever comes into view when he starts the tape running is fair game for his video vignettes, so he says. Like other video artists who started out in the late 60s, he adheres to certain conventions: he uses real time, incidental sound, "real simple stuff." But he takes real time—that basic tool of process art—and turns it into comic timing.

You could say that Wegman, like a maverick post-minimalist, was taking Minimalism beyond itself into some ultimate reduction. In his case, the reduction of intellect. You could even say he was going further, opposing the rigors of conceptualist logic with the *tabula rasa*—the blank mind, the empty slate. The minimalists reduced their art to stolid object. The conceptualists reduced it to idea. Process artists reduced their work to raw material, and performance artists to the even rawer material of their own bodies. Wegman, always contrarily carrying things one step further, reduced his body to a stolid object, emptied his mind of ideas, gave human attributes to objects, and handed over the role of creator to his dog. He allowed things to happen, acknowledging the humanity of process and viewer. He started a chain reaction that released psychological and narrative elements, triggered by undirected imagination and improvised play. The "end game" art of the late 60s led Wegman to a comically vacant, playful, behavioral act.

While most of his contemporaries were still in the thrall of an aesthetic of boredom—exploring formal repetitions, serial permutations, cyclical monotonies and using their bodies as embodiments of abstract concerns—Wegman realized that the narrative inanities of real TV and real life were more to the point, that the unpredictable and the inept were more moving than logical moves. From the aesthetic of boredom, he arrived at the cosmic joke.





Massage Chair



New & Used Car Salesman

Wegman's video was at the forefront of a subtle shift from the aesthetic of boredom to the aesthetic of the amateur that reigns today. He was, in a sense, ahead of his time. During the 1970s this aesthetic of the amateur sprang up in the real world as well as in art. Saturated with specialists of all sorts, with slick technology as well as sleek art, and disillusioned by the turn of worldly events, people—and artists—began wanting to expose flaws, foibles, weaknesses and failings: they wanted to see human imperfections. They began to cherish the defects in homemade things. This went along with the beginnings of the end of the idea of progress toward a utopian future, and with a newly critical attitude toward modernization—and Modernism itself. The 70s can be seen as a criticism of the optimistic 60s: it presented antidotes. It was a reformation as well as a rebellion: the do-it-yourself decade.

Contrast, for example, the camp TV hit of the pop 60s, *Batman*, or the high-tech 60s *Star Trek*, with the camp hits of 70s TV: *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *The Gong Show*. Contrast Sean Connery's suave James Bond with Woody Allen's schlemiel. Or contrast the professionalism of 60s rock music with, in the 70s, the absurd excesses of glitter rock, the mindlessness of disco, the deliberate ineptitude of punk.

Or, to get back to art, contrast Nam June Paik's video art of the 60s with Wegman's of the 70s. It's state-of-the-art versus seat-of-the-pants. If Paik's work takes a loud counter-culture stance, Wegman's is modest, making no claims. Where Paik's work seduces with ultra-smart wit, Wegman's rolls over and plays dead, beguiling us by proving it's no threat. Instead of Paik's unending analogies between object and image, Wegman plays on the failure of images to live up to words—and plays it for laughs. Instead of Paik's formal juxtapositions, Wegman informally offers anecdotal incident—the bare bones of some illogical situation logically completing itself, or vice versa. There's something persuasively passive about Wegman's work: what structure there is seems makeshift and incidental. His compositions are usually centered, not for purposes of composition but, as he points out, to allow for different video viewing systems that sometimes crop edges.

Perhaps it's not fair to compare the video guru of the international avant garde with the homegrown work of an all-American boy and his dog. Nam June Paik's video is also sculpture: Wegman's is simply the barest sketch. And yet that's its appeal and its strength. His video works are like





Spelling Lesson



Bad Movies

his doodled pencil drawings—quick easy notes with instant results, casually testing what lies along the path of least resistance. By using video unabashedly as do-it-yourself TV, he anticipated the advent of cable TV coming into the home with an aw shucks low budget mentality. His sadsack, deadpan, comic video art may play dumb, but by doing so it sets itself squarely against high tech culture and high seriousness in art. If during the 70s, a great deal of art was modest or truculent, reticent or brash—and deliberately, insistently anecdotal and amateur—it was to rebuke the grandiose pretensions in color field painting and minimalist sculpture. Or, as Wegman would say, “majestic art.” Playing dumb was Wegman’s renegade version of the post-minimalist breakdown of style and refusal to construct forms. It was also an anti-conceptualist refusal to have any bright ideas.

*The tapes aren’t dealing with ideas but with visual process. I don’t know what specific qualifications I was using. I think I decided I didn’t want to deal with anything too hot like sex or the war. I liked dumb TV: Ozzie and Harriet, California used car ads. Baldessari used ‘in’ jokes in terms of art. I taped Bob and Ray off the TV. My tapes were like a hole.*

The Bob and Ray Show provides a fruitful, if unlikely, comparison. Just as Wegman started out in the late 60s as a serious post-minimalist, Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding started out as serious newscasters in the late 1940s. But they began to amuse themselves on the air and soon became a comedy team on radio and early TV. Like Wegman, their deadpan humor involves a flat delivery, a deliberately clumsy parodying of radio dramas, TV talk shows and commercials, and leaves you wondering why it’s funny. Like Wegman, they’re an acquired taste. Their humor too is based on absurd expectations, inadequacies, and things that don’t work. They enact the drama of “Mary Backstage, Noble Wife.” (One of Wegman’s recent photographs of Man Ray is titled *Noble Dog, Paint by Numbers*.) They bumblingly promote things like The Bob and Ray Burglar Kit, a sack containing a screwdriver, a glass cutter, a pair of gloves, a toilet plunger and other not quite appropriate objects. (Think of Wegman’s massage chair, or an early tape of his starring a toilet plunger and an old console TV set). They advertise The International House of Toast. (Another of Wegman’s early tapes involves “spitting bread” instead of buttering it.) Or as Mary McGoon, Ray gives a cooking demonstration: “alternate little pieces of shish with pieces of kebob,” he/she instructs while ramming tomatoes onto a broomstick. Wegman’s video work has the same contrarily awkward relationship with domestic objects and the clichés of commercial TV.





Ray Learning How to Smoke

7. Wegman's four longer—and atypical—tapes clarify some of his more serious concerns. *Semi-Buffer* (1975), his first color tape (using actors and shot by a Boston television crew), deals with formality and behavior as well as substitutions. Derived from Emily Post's text on the etiquette of a semi-buffer dinner, this tape shows three successive groups of people eating the same dinner (at the Fanny Farmer school) with differing degrees of formality. *Gray Hairs* (1976) also has a layered texture, but the layers are simultaneous and involve actual surface texture rather than narrative, and formalism rather than formality. In it, a double exposure close-up of Man Ray's fur is accompanied by two layers of sound, both of which are the dog's panting. Almost totally abstract, it ends with a shot of Man Ray's nose and the microphone, exposing its subjects. In *The Accident Tape* (1977), three people tell the story of an accident. One was a witness, the other two try to repeat what the witness said. The story is told backwards, and the layers of reality and simulation as well as the discrepancies in the repetitions, give an odd slant to the narrative. In *Gray Hairs*, you're not quite sure what you're seeing; in *The Accident Tape*, you don't quite know what you're hearing. Another kind of doubling, with substitution and confusion, occurs in *Man Ray Man Ray* (1978), which opens with the dog turning his head from side to side as his name is called. A mock documentary, this tape mixes facts and images of Man Ray the dog and Man Ray the artist, such as "his closest friends besides Bill and Gayle were Picabia and Duchamp."

8. Video, like Polaroid and the quick pencil sketch, gives immediate results. All are mediums of instant image feedback, intimacy, and immediate gratification, open to questions of narcissism. Rosalind Krauss, writing of the narcissistic implications of the video medium, has described video art as "consciousness doubling back upon itself." Wegman's video, however, might be better described as the unconscious doubling back upon consciousness.

Wegman's idiosyncratic humor, like Bob and Ray's, is off-center, vaudevillian, droll rather than witty, based on apparent incompetence rather than skill in repartee. In a way it's the reverse of Duchampian wit, for as William Hazlitt once said, wit is the product of fancy while humor is the growth of accident. Instead of cryptic comments and esoteric meanings, Wegman's humor is about disappointment and failure. Not only Man Ray's failure to spell correctly in his famous "Spelling Lesson" tape (the failure of a dog to be a person), but the failure of words to correspond to images, feelings to expressions, actions to results. Wegman's humor works in the realm of discrepancy—with substitutions, reversals, accidents, and shifts—which is why it's hard to sort out what's dumb from what's smart.<sup>7</sup>

There are even closer resemblances between Wegman's video and Bob and Ray's skits. On one of their programs, Bob interviews a dog. On another, a *What's My Line* skit, the man with the unusual occupation runs a fleet of dogs trained to run onto the field at football games—to delay the game so the TV sponsors can insert more commercials. Wegman's tape of the two dogs following the offscreen tennis ball in unison might even recall Bob and Ray's McBeeBee Twins who say the same things a fraction of a second apart. Which leads to the question of the dog's role in Wegman's video work. Wegman sees himself and Man Ray as "... something American, sort of a team—Bill and Ray. Me speaking, him responding. He was real easy to use. Sometimes he'd trick me into doing something better than I'd intended to do. He was a working dog." Man Ray was not just the star of some of Wegman's best videotapes; the canny canine was also Wegman's collaborator. "There's always the risk in video of putting yourself on TV, being narcissistic. I think Man Ray diverted all that."<sup>8</sup>

In 1977 Wegman started using color. The heat of the lights was a problem for Man Ray. "He couldn't stand being under the lights very long." In the color tapes Wegman extends the concept of the amateur into the realm of the defective. Some are close-ups of Wegman's mouth conversing with itself, like the torso in "Stomach Song." The dialogues, which are deliberately vacant, suggest mental deficiencies or subnormal mentality. In one, the mouth tries to recite the alphabet, getting progressively more confused and making mistakes. More disturbing than funny, these tapes emphasize the pathos underlying humor and the close connection between comedy and tragedy. Other color videotapes, like shaggy dog stories cut short, involve Man Ray's failure to respond to cues, or to learn how to smoke, or Wegman's failure to give adequate street directions (while absently smoking four cigarettes at once) or to



memorize some lines from a book. The recurring theme: not just stupidity but the progressive disintegration of logical and narrative structures in time. In 1978 Wegman stopped working with video. Man Ray has since died, and recently Wegman began using video again, making longer tapes.

His video works of 1970–1978 may be as good natured, as eccentric, as willing to try anything—and as lovable—as his late dog Man Ray, but they also have teeth. In a conceptualized, process-oriented video climate, Wegman played the fool. Against the cerebral humor of Bruce Nauman's body-as-sculpture puns or John Baldessari's artist-as-wise-man parables, Wegman acted the buffoon. Into a milieu of narcissistic performance video, Wegman brought his dog. In an art world saturated with ideas, he affected ignorance. Ridiculing the pretensions of high art and the debasements of mass culture, questioning distinctions between professional and amateur, public and private, using human imperfections and behavioral quirks, his video works are not as simple as they might seem. He showed the way to a new generation of young video artists involved with mock entertainment, amateur TV, accessibility and critiques of mass culture. The smartest thing he ever did was to play dumb.

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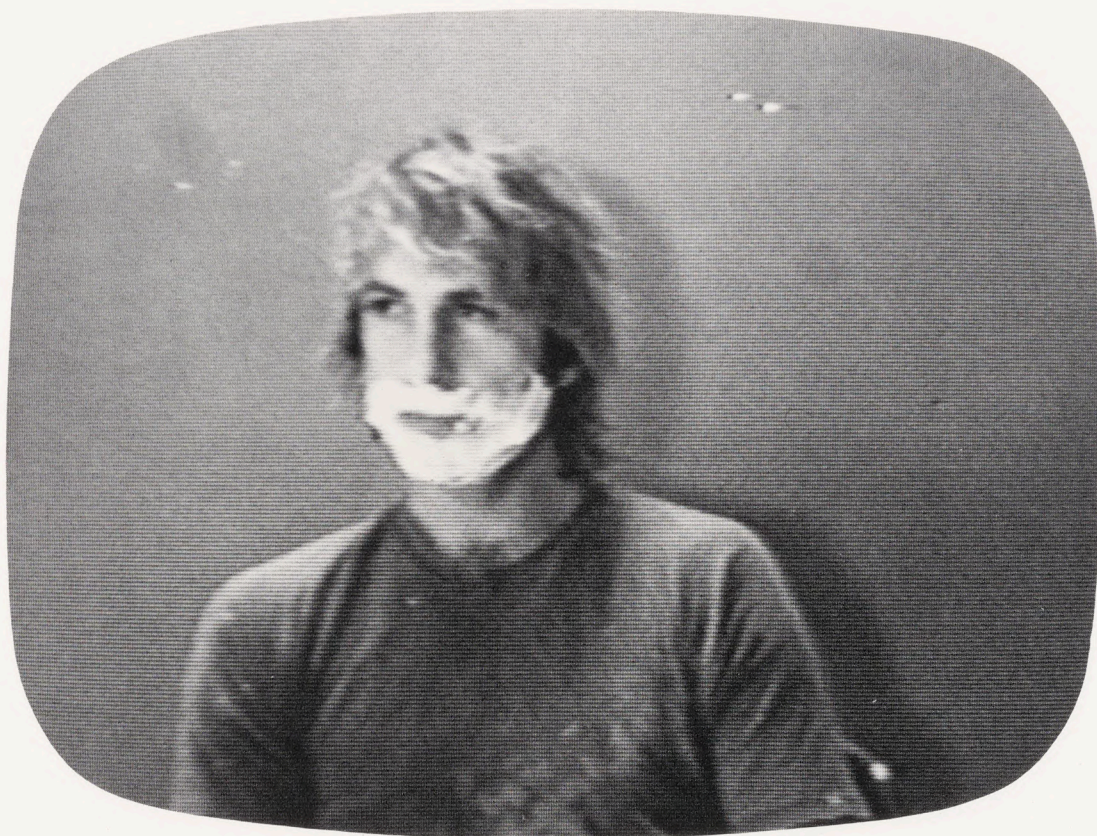




*New & Used Car Salesman*

I am lifting this eighty-pound dog onto my lap and I'm trying to talk normally even though the pain from the weight of the dog is almost unbearable. It's very hard to talk and keep a straight face with the dog on my lap because he fidgets so and he tries to get away, he tries to break out of my grip but I have him securely locked in my arms. I'm trying to sell you a new or used car from our downtown lot and trying to talk you into buying one and I hope that if perhaps if I have this dog on my lap you'll come to see me as a kind person, because a mean person . . . if I was a mean person and a shark so to speak, this dog wouldn't let me touch him and paw him so; he'd uh, he wouldn't have such faith in me. And so too, just as this dog trusts me, I would like you out there to trust me and come down to our new and used car lot and buy some of our quality cars. I know you'll be satisfied. Thousands of others have been. Thank you for listening.





*Born With No Mouth*

I was born with no mouth at all—just a smooth kind of plane across my face. I did have a well developed nose when I was born, but actually I did have a mouth, it was more a kind of slit. It was about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch wide and hardly  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch high and my parents just figured that gradually it would develop—that it would grow into a real mouth—but by the time I was six they could see it wasn't going to happen and they were afraid to send me to school with a mouth like that—so when my grandfather died—when I was six, they transplanted his mouth onto mine—took out my mouth—and I think they gave it to the University of Massachusetts—so I've been shaving ever since I was six.





### *Rage & Depression*

I had these terrible fits of rage and depression all the time. It just got worse and worse and worse. Finally my parents had me committed. They tried all kinds of therapy. Finally they settled on shock. The doctors brought me into this room in a straight jacket because I still had this terrible, terrible temper. I was just the meanest cuss you could imagine and when they put this cold, metal electrode, or whatever it was, to my chest, I started to giggle and then when they shocked me, it froze on my face into this smile and even though I'm still incredibly depressed—everyone thinks I'm happy. I don't know what I'm going to do.





### *Spelling Lesson*

P-A-R-K was spelt correctly. *Wait* a minute. And you spelt O-U-T right. But when it came to BEACH, you spelt it B-E-E-C-H, which is like . . . uh, well, there's a gum called beech-nut gum, but the correct spelling is . . . we meant beach like the sand, like the ocean, so it should have been B-E-A-C-H. (Man Ray whines.) You see, that's the difference. Well okay, I forgive you, but remember it next time.



## Biography

- 1943 Born 3 December, Holyoke, Massachusetts
- 1961-65 Attended Massachusetts College of Art, Boston; B.F.A., 1965
- 1965-67 Attended University of Illinois, Champaign; M.F.A., 1967
- 1967-69 Instructor in University of Wisconsin Center System, Wausau and Waukesha
- 1969-70 Visiting Sculptor at University of Wisconsin, Madison
- 1970-71 Lecturer at California State College, Long Beach
- 1972 Moved to New York City  
Joined Sonnabend Gallery, New York
- 1973 Awarded National Endowment for the Arts grant
- 1975 Awarded Guggenheim Foundation fellowship
- 1976 Awarded National Endowment for the Arts grant
- 1978 Joined Holly Solomon Gallery, New York
- 1979 Awarded Creative Artists Public Service grant, New York State Council on the Arts
- 1982 Awarded National Endowment for the Arts grant

### Selected One-man Exhibitions

- 1971 Galerie Sonnabend, Paris  
Pomona College Art Gallery, California
- 1972 Sonnabend Gallery, New York  
Galerie Ernst, Hanover, West Germany  
Konrad Fischer Gallery, Düsseldorf

- 1973 Galerie Sonnabend, Paris  
Texas Gallery, Houston  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

- 1974 112 Greene Street, New York  
Texas Gallery, Houston

- 1975 Mayor Gallery, London  
Galleria Alessandra Castelli, Milan  
Konrad Fischer Gallery, Düsseldorf

- 1976 The Kitchen, New York

- 1977 Sonnabend Gallery, New York  
Bruno Soletti Gallery, Milan

- 1978 Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles

- 1979 Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, England  
Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Gallery Design, Los Angeles  
*William Wegman: Drawings, Photographs, Videotapes*, Fine Arts Galleries, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

- 1980 Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago  
Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

- 1981 Vivianne Esders Gallery, Paris  
Clarence Kennedy Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Yarlow/Salzman Gallery, Toronto  
Castelli-Goodman-Solomon Gallery, East Hampton, New York

- 1982 The Dart Gallery, Inc., Chicago  
McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1968 *Biennial of Painting and Sculpture*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis  
*Soft Art*, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton

- 1969 Milwaukee Art Center  
*Place and Process*, Edmonton Art Gallery, Alberta  
*Art by Telephone*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago  
*Sign, Signal, Symbol*, Moreau Art Gallery, St. Mary's College, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Illinois  
*Other Ideas*, Detroit Institute of Arts

- 1970 *Art in the Mind*, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio

- 1971 24 *Young Los Angeles Artists*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
11 *Los Angeles Artists*, Hayward Gallery, London

- 1972 *Documenta V*, Kassel, West Germany  
Spoleto Festival, Italy  
15 *L.A. Artists*, Pasadena Art Museum

- 1973 *Whitney Annual*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
13 *Artists Chosen for Documenta*, Sonnabend Gallery, New York  
*Circuits: A Video Invitational*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse

- 1974 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

- 1975 George Eastman House, Rochester, New York  
*Dessins Contemporains*, Maison de la Culture, Rennes, France  
*Matrix 9*, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut  
*Word/Number/Image*, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York

- 1976 *American Family Portraits*, Philadelphia Museum of Art  
*Video Art: An Overview*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
*Commissioned Video Works*, University Art Museum, Berkeley

- 1977 *Photography as an Art Form*, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida



- The Vanguard: Works on Paper*, Newport Art Association, Newport Beach, California  
*The Word as Image*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- 1978 23 *Photographers*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, England  
*Music*, Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*Robert Cumming—William Wegman*, Baxter Art Gallery, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena  
*Contemporary American Photo Works*, Museum of Fine Art, Houston
- 1979 *Images of the Self*, Hampshire College Gallery, Amherst, Massachusetts  
*The Altered Photograph*, P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York  
20 x 24, LIGHT Gallery, New York  
*Attitudes: Photography in the 1970s*, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California  
*Concept, Narrative, Document*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- 1980 *The Photograph Transformed*, Touchstone Gallery, New York  
*Les Nouveaux Fauves/Die Neue Wilden*, Neue Galerie/Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen, West Germany  
*Invented Images*, UCSB Art Museum, University of California at Santa Barbara  
*Pier and Ocean*, Hayward Gallery, London  
Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, The Netherlands  
*Ils se disent peintres, ils se disent photographes*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
- 1981 *New Directions: Contemporary American Art from the Commodities Corporation Collection*, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York  
*Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
*The Morton C. Neumann Family Collection*, Art Institute of Chicago

- Staged Shots*, Delahunty Gallery, Dallas  
*Instant Photography*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam  
*Art for ERA*, Zabriskie Gallery, New York  
*Not Just for Laughs, The Art of Subversion*, The New Museum, New York  
*Drawing Distinctions: American Drawings of the Seventies*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark
- 1982 *Artists' Photographs*, Fine Arts Gallery, University of South Florida, Tampa  
*A History of Photography from Chicago Collections*, Art Institute of Chicago  
*Aspects of Post-Modernism*, Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta  
*Visions in Disbelief: The 4th Biennale of Sydney*, Sydney, Australia

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## Captions

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

*Noble Dog—Paint By Numbers* 1978

black and white photograph with watercolor and ink

12½ x 10

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Contemplating the Bust of Man Ray* 1978

from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982

black and white photograph

14 x 11

Courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York

*Untitled* 1968

fiberglass screening

dimensions variable

(destroyed)

*Untitled* 1969

mixed media

ca. 10 x 15 (foot symbol)

(destroyed)

*Faculty Lounge* 1969 (detail)

2 black and white photographs

6⅞ x 9½ and 9½ x 6⅞

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Cotto* 1970

black and white photograph

10⅝ x 10⅝

Collection Holly and Horace Solomon, New York

*Single and Double Studio* 1970-71

2 black and white photographs

11 x 11 each

Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Madam I'm Adam* 1970

2 black and white photographs

8¾ x 7¾ each

Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Crow* 1970

black and white photograph

10¼ x 10¼

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Dog Dream* 1970

4 black and white photographs

7⅞ x 7⅞ each

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Family Combinations* 1972

6 black and white photographs

11⅞ x 10¾ each

Collection Holly and Horace Solomon, New York

*Lynn, Lynn/Terry, Terry* 1971

3 black and white photographs

13⅞ x 10½ each

Collection Courtney Sale and Steven J. Ross, New York

*Doing the Dishes* 1972

black and white photograph

14 x 11

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*He Showed Her What He Made* 1972

black and white photograph

14 x 11

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Drinking Milk* 1971

2 black and white photographs

12⅞ x 10¼ and 10½ x 10½

Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Stormy Night* 1972

9 black and white photographs

14 x 11 each

Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*Dropping Milk* 1972

3 black and white photographs

14 x 11 each

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Morton Neumann, Chicago

*Before/On/After: Permutations* 1972

7 black and white photographs

9½ x 7¾ each

Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

*The Spike* 1973

2 black and white photographs

11 x 14 each

Collection Holly and Horace Solomon, New York

*Croquet* 1973

2 black and white photographs

14 x 11 each

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Nobel for Tree Theory* 1978

watercolor, graphite on paper

11 x 8½

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Toddler Holds Couple Hostage* 1974-78

ink on paper

8½ x 11

Collection Holly and Horace Solomon, New York

*Washington State Friends* 1982

watercolor on paper

10½ x 14

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Drowned* 1974

graphite on paper

8½ x 11

Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

*Ray Cat* 1979 from the portfolio

*Improved Photographs*

black and white photograph with silkscreen

20 x 16



Collection the artist, courtesy Holly Solomon Editions, Ltd., New York  
*Home of Betty Grable* 1979  
 black and white photograph with watercolor and ink  
 13 x 10½  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*Bring Me the Head of a Big Boy* 1981  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Richard Grossman, Minneapolis  
*Fey Ray* 1979  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Strauss, Denver, Colorado  
*Silver Triptych* 1982 (detail)  
 3 color Polaroid photographs  
 24 x 20 each  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*Floor Piece* 1980  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Morton Rapp  
*Untitled* 1980  
 2 color Polaroid photographs  
 24 x 20 each  
 Private Collection  
*Polynesian* 1980  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Laura Carpenter, Delahunty Gallery, Dallas  
*French* 1980  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*FROG/frog* 1982  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*Broken/Hurt* 1981  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Will Hokin, Chicago  
*Garden* 1982  
 2 color Polaroid photographs  
 24 x 20 each  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*Leopard/Zebra—Zebra/Leopard* 1981  
 2 color Polaroid photographs  
 24 x 20 each  
 Collection Sherry and Alan Koppel, Chicago  
*Blue Boy* 1980  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20

Collection Andrew and Betsy Rosenfield, Chicago  
*Bookends* 1981  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York  
*Modeling School* 1974  
 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982  
 black and white photograph  
 14 x 11  
 Collection the artist; courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York  
*Dog House* 1981  
 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982  
 black and white photograph  
 14 x 11  
 Collection the artist; courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York  
*Elephant* 1981  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco  
*Ray Bat* 1980  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Private Collection  
*Of the Lake* 1976  
 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982  
 black and white photograph  
 14 x 11  
 Collection the artist; courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York  
*Dog Cabin* 1979  
 from the portfolio *Man Ray* 1982  
 black and white photograph  
 14 x 11  
 Collection the artist; courtesy Holly Solomon Editions Ltd., New York  
*Dino Ray* 1981  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Will Hokin, Chicago  
*Dusted* 1982  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Gifford Myers, Altadena, California  
 cover  
*Sitting Airedale with Tale* 1981  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, Norman E. Boasberg Fund  
 back cover  
*Gold and Silver Paws* 1980  
 color Polaroid photograph  
 24 x 20  
 Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

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 William Wegman: pp 8, 9



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